Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

Ray Cummings – Seabury Quinn – Victor Rousseau – John Martin Leahy – Robert S. Carr – Oscar Schisgall

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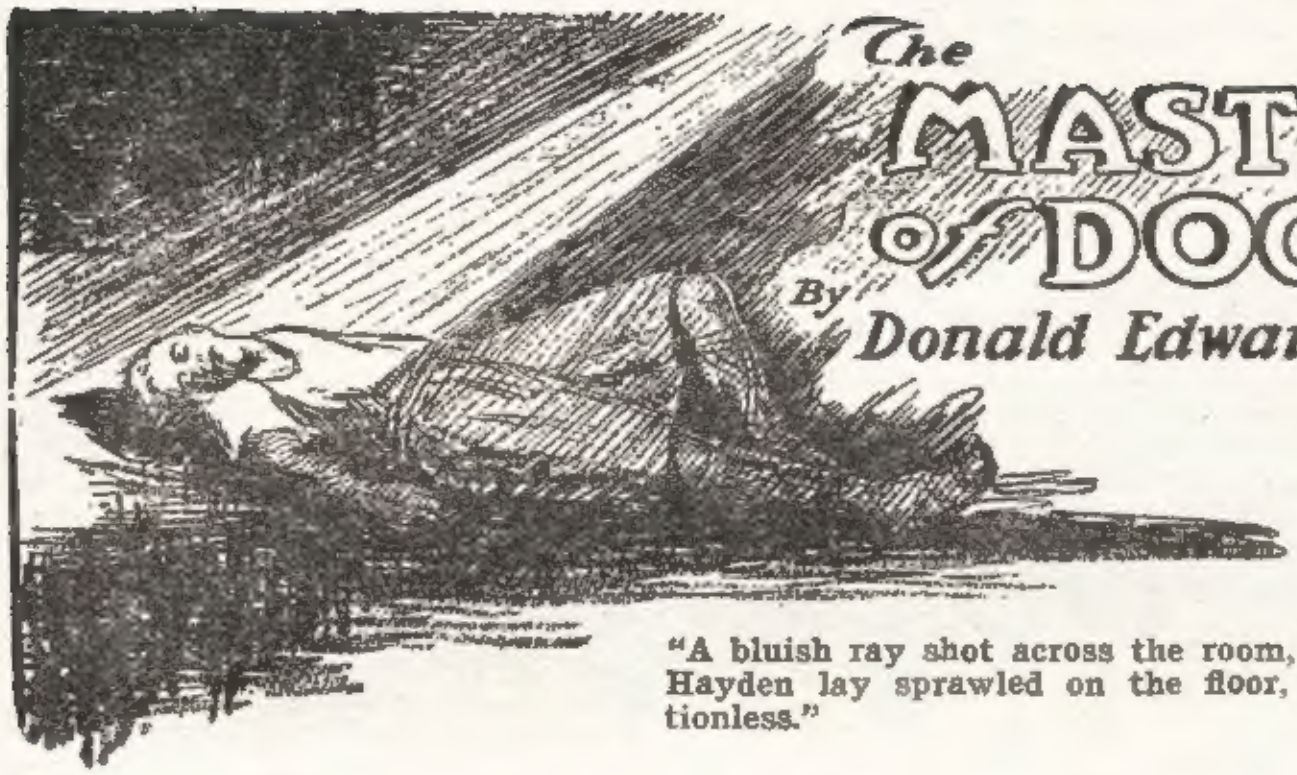


The MASTER of DOOM

By Donald Edward Keyhoe

"A bluish ray shot across the room, and Hayden lay sprawled on the floor, motionless."

STANLEY GRAHAM paused in adjusting the seaplane windshield and glanced down at the Titian-haired girl who sat beside him in the cockpit.

"Betty, I wish you'd wait until some other time," he said earnestly. "The governor won't like it. He probably thought this was an ordinary 'hop' when he said you could go."

A mischievous dimple appeared in Betty's cheek.

"Don't worry about Uncle Bob—I'll fix it if he gets a grouch. And you needn't try to get rid of me, either. This 'vanishing island' of Captain Anderson's is the first interesting thing in Guam for six months. If you're going out to hunt for it I'm going with you."

She settled herself down in the seat, pursing her lips up at him in mock defiance. Graham ran his hand through his hair in pretended despair. Then his tanned face lighted with a good-natured grin.

"All right—and if we get lost, remember we'll probably drift a day or two before we're picked up. Every compass on this station has gone bad, and flying offshore is half guesswork. As for Andy's story—that's plain bunk. He probably got tanked up on aguardiente and ran the *Rivaro* off her course onto a shoal somewhere. There couldn't be any island where he says his old tub sank—the chart shows three hundred fathoms all around there."

"Then why are you looking for it?" asked Betty with a slightly malicious twinkle in her blue eyes.

Graham shrugged his shoulders.

"Orders—from someone who isn't acquainted with Andy's capacity for native liquor. I'm to see if there's a new shoal sprung up overnight. And if you insist on going we may as well get started."

He tempered this last remark with a smile as he turned to signal the crew in the rear compartment, for he had a more than ordinary interest in the governor's attractive niece.

As the powerful F-5-L roared across Apra Bay a few minutes later he switched on the interphones, and for an hour he and Betty conversed while the Pacific sped swiftly below. When the plane reached the area in which the *Rivaro* was supposed to have met her peculiar end he carefully inspected the sea for various altitudes, but was unable to discern any sign of a reef or shoal. He was still

peering downward when he felt a hurried touch on his shoulder. Glancing back into the hull, he saw the excited face of his radio operator. The man handed him a hastily scrawled note.

"Radio Hill was calling for help," he read with startled eyes. "Then everything went dead. Can't raise the Hill or the air station."

Dumfounded, he stared at the words. Radio Hill was the commonly used name for the huge navy station which maintained communication with the United States. Surely there could be no practical joke connected with a distress signal sent from there. Yet what could have occurred in the peaceful little island to cause the broadcasting of such a call?

In sudden alarm he pivoted the F-5-L steeply on one wing and sent it hurtling back toward Guam. For several minutes the plane raced on, its motors at full speed. Gradually a perplexing frown spread over his face. At the point where the island should begin to show in a bluish haze there was nothing to be seen. He climbed quickly to a higher altitude, thinking that his erratic compass might have set him off his course. Still there was no sight of the rocky little island they had left such a short time before.

He glanced aside at Betty, whose lips were anxiously parted. As he looked down over the broad expanse of the sea a change in its surface caught his eye. The easy swells had grown into ugly rollers, which increased swiftly in size as the plane passed above, until finally they became great, white-topped walls of greenish water.

A horrible thought flashed through Graham's mind. Spiraling down to a height of a thousand feet, he leaned far out and almost fearfully searched the heaving sea, hoping against the premonition that had forced itself upon him. Then his face turned gray under its tan, for in the angrily tossing waves he saw a mass of sodden wreckage—bits of tangled debris with not a single sign of human life.

Guam had sunk beneath the sea!

Heartsick, he tore his eyes from the silent evidence of that incredible truth and mechanically throttled the motors for a slow glide. Betty had slumped against the side of the hull, white and faint, while the mechanics and the radio operator were staring in consternation from the rear compartment. As the plane dipped lower his bewilderment grew. What tremendous cataclysm could account for the almost total absence of such objects as might be expected to remain on top of the water? To create a suction strong enough to carry down every person—almost every proof of their existence—the island must have sunk instantly, without a moment's warning to its doomed inhabitants.

A sudden realization of their own plight aroused him from his daze. The F-5-L held only enough gas for three hours' flight. Before that time had passed they must find land or face a 1500-mile westward drift to the Philippines, a long, torturing passage from which none could emerge alive, for the plane carried no food and only a little water.

Disregarding his compass, he headed approximately northeast, using the sun as a rough check on his direction. The Japanese-owned island of Rota lay only a short distance along this course. Then as fifteen minutes passed his anxiety deepened into dismay. Rota also had disappeared.

The only other island of which he had definite knowledge was Saipan, much farther north. It was doubtful if they could reach it, but as it offered the only solution he swung the plane in that direction, praying that it had not suffered the mysterious fate of the lower Marianna group.

Betty was bravely endeavoring to hide the sorrow he knew she felt at the loss of her uncle—a sorrow which for the time dwarfed her alarm at their predicament. The mechanics, clearly understanding the danger which threatened, were carefully nursing the motors against the possibility of an inopportune forced landing.

AN HOUR passed. Graham was mechanically searching the horizon with the forlorn hope of sighting one of the few island trading ships which plied those waters, when a tiny blur became visible off to the northwest. In heartfelt relief he swung the plane toward it, descending on a long glide. Gradually the blur took form as an island about five miles in length and two miles in width, with steep, rugged sides broken only in one spot. At this point was a slightly sheltered cove, in which a large ship would have found close quarters.

But the cove ceased to claim his attention as the plane drew closer, for in the exact center of the island was a huge oval depression containing a white stone structure at least five hundred feet in diameter and a perfect circle in shape. In the middle of the building rose a low, wide tower, somewhat like a small lighthouse, from which glistening bands of metal led to numerous smaller towers spaced equidistantly along the perimeter. It suddenly occurred to him that all of this was invisible from the sea, placed as it was in this deep hollow. The thought brought with it a distinct foreboding. What could this strange place be, hidden away in a most forsaken corner of the world? This building could not have been erected recently, for such a project must have meant months, perhaps years of labor. It would hardly be a secret fortress of some foreign power, for it would serve no useful purpose there. The tiny harbor would hardly hold one battleship. Yet there was obviously some purpose back of it all.

Extremely uneasy, but realizing that this might be their only chance of salvation, he nosed the plane down and prepared to alight. As he glanced down in leveling off, an odd sight met his eyes. Submerged on its side under the water lay the hulk of a large ship, completely blocking the entrance to the bay for any vessel drawing more than six feet. It flashed by before he could take a second glance, and the next second the plane settled onto the placid surface of the little harbor.

Taxiing well up onto the beach, he shut off the motors. As he had thought, there was no sign of the central building from this point.

"I don't like this," he told the others. "If I could be sure Saipan hadn't sunk like Guam I'd keep on. Anyone have an idea of where we are?"

Betty shook her head mutely, while the crew stared at each other for a moment.

"Maybe it's a leper colony," ventured the radio operator. "They put 'em way out on places like this."

Graham shook his head hurriedly, for Betty's face had gone pale.

"You're wrong there. I've seen those colonies and they're nothing like this. Anyway, we'd have heard of it."

"Somebody's lookin' us over," cut in Riley, the crew chief. "Watch that break in the rocks, sir. I saw ——"

He fell silent as a figure emerged from the breach he had mentioned. A second one followed closely, and finally a score of dark-skinned men, trailing behind in single file. A hundred feet away the procession halted. The leaders proved to be white men, wearing the customary white duck and the pith helmets of the tropics. The blacks seemed to be of a fiercer race

than the Chamorros usually found in the Marianna Islands. Graham conjectured that they were of the Malay strain. He noted with increasing apprehension that each one was armed with a long machete, and that seven or eight carried rifles.

He and his companions had by this time climbed out upon the beach. The taller of the two leaders advanced calmly toward them, sweeping each one with a hard, unwavering gaze. Graham with difficulty repressed a start as he saw the eyes of the man. There was something repelling about them—an uncanny age-oldness, like burnt-out fires. Yet the features under the white helmet indicated a man under forty. When he spoke it was in a harsh, unpleasant voice.

"I presume from the insignia on your plane that you are Americans—perhaps you are not aware that this is private property. May I ask your purpose in landing here?"

Graham's face flushed at the open hostility in the other's tone.

"This is the only place we could find," he said shortly. "Our base—Guam—has been sunk by an earthquake. We were heading for Saipan when we saw this island."

The stranger's eyes opened in a peculiar stare.

"Guam sunk! Ridiculous! You would have gone down with it, too. Your story is——"

"I tell you it is gone," snapped Graham, his patience sorely strained. "We were flying some miles offshore. When we came back there was nothing left but some debris in the water."

Oddly, his explanation seemed to afford the other man a vague relief.

"Pardon my discourtesy," he said with sudden suavity, "but we have gone to great trouble in keeping our research work from the public, and I thought for a moment you were merely landing here in curiosity."

"Far from it," replied Graham rather grimly. "I never even knew there was any island here. But I guess we'll have to force ourselves on you—at least till we can radio the army transport. She's due at Guam in three days, and I can have her put in here."

"We haven't any radio," said the other man carelessly, "but there's a small schooner that touches here once a month. We'll take care of you till then."

He turned and joined his companion, who had waited with the restless natives. The radio operator spoke in a cautious whisper.

"Say, lieutenant, there's somethin' crooked about this. If those ain't radio masts up there, what are they? This bird's got a queer look, too. He gives me the creeps."

"He has a pistol under his coat, too," said Betty in a low tone. "I saw it when he turned around. Oh, Stan, I wish we hadn't stopped here. Who do you suppose they are?"

Before Graham could reply the man had returned.

"My men will draw your seaplane up on the beach," he began. "You may come with me and we can make any necessary plans later."

Followed by the castaways, he swung off toward the breach in the rocks. Close behind came a dozen of the blacks, the rest having remained with the plane at the direction of the second white man.

As they proceeded, Graham saw that there had been a wide road leading down to the beach, but that an effort had been made to conceal its traces. A moment later he noticed that the sullen natives had closed in on both sides as well as in the rear. His sense of impending evil increased. At last he strode up to the head of the column.

"I have changed my mind," he told the leader firmly. "We will go on to Saipan. You can give us some

gasoline and we will not bother you any more."

The man stopped abruptly.

"You will have to stay here now," he said coldly. "It was not necessary for you to stop here, but now that you are here you will have to stay."

"*Have* to stay?" Graham flared out hotly. "The United States will have something to say about this—that plane is a naval vessel!"

"The United States means nothing to us," returned the other with a contemptuous shrug. "As for going on, you would not get very far now."

He nodded coolly toward the beach. An ejaculation escaped Graham's lips as he turned about. The F-5-L was almost hidden by a cloud of smoke, out of which poured a yellow flame. Hurling aside the nearest native, he broke through the threatening blacks, only to halt as he realized the futility of unarmed resistance and the danger to which Betty would be exposed. At a curt command the natives had raised their menacing rifles, while several machetes gleamed in sinister suggestion.

"Think twice," commented the leader ironically, "before you trifle with these boys. They are not like your peaceful Chamorros."

He motioned them to precede him, and with a growing sense of helplessness Graham silently indicated to his companions a quiet submission. Passing through the opening in the rock wall, they descended into the oval depression containing the building they had seen. It was even larger than it had seemed from the air. It had been constructed of white stone, apparently quarried from the hollow in which it stood. Every window on the lower floor was heavily barred, as were also the wide entrances. The towers around the edge of the building were made of some dark substance, in appearance like hard rubber. Each one bore a number at its base. The broad bands of metal which ran from each of these towers to the central one were of some metal Graham could not identify, for it did not seem to be copper although it had a red-gold glow. A second glance showed him a strange phenomenon. Around each band danced an ever-changing mirage, like fantastic heat waves.

As they reached the main entrance the barrier swung back silently, though there was no one to be seen. Then came a march of several minutes through a long passage, with many barred doors on each side. From behind some of these sounded the ceaseless whir of machinery. At last their captor halted before a door at the top of a flight of broad stairs. Entering, the captives found themselves in a suite of rooms so sumptuously furnished that except for its barricaded windows it might have been the abode of an Oriental prince. Beautifully woven tropical rugs covered the mirrorlike floors. On all sides hung works of old masters, illuminated by the soft glow from exquisitely fashioned silver chandeliers. A long library table bearing several books and magazines stood in the middle of the room. The tropical furniture, of highest quality Bilibid, was carefully harmonized with the delicately shaded walls.

As the door clicked shut between the prisoners and their strange captor, Graham stepped to the nearest window and looked out into the enclosed circular courtyard which lay below. A blinding glare greeted his gaze. After a moment he made out a battery of many-prismed reflecting mirrors, set in concentric circles and focused at some spot above, evidently below the top of the main tower. His inspection was cut short by an exclamation from Riley. He turned. The crew chief was staring at a silver pitcher he had picked up.

"Say—these birds must be pirates," he observed excitedly. "This thing came off the old *Menocal*. Remember—the freighter that checked out of Frisco four years ago and never showed up again? Everybody thought she went down in a typhoon but I'll bet these bums got her."

"I don't think they're pirates," said Graham thoughtfully. "It's something deeper than that. But you've given me a hunch. There was an old wreck just under the water in the bay, and it was big enough to be the *Menocal*. And if anyone wanted to hide away from the world and cover up his tracks he'd certainly get rid of the ship. This place wasn't built overnight—maybe it took two or three trips to get all the stuff here. That road down on the beach was probably made when they carted their supplies ashore."

Riley whistled.

"Gosh, you'd think somebody'd have got wise to it. But they surely picked a good place—nobody comes this way in a blue moon."

"Once they had it finished nobody could see a thing," Graham pointed out. "Even if some trader did happen by here he'd never guess the island was inhabited."

"But why should they do such a thing?" asked Betty incredulously. "That man said something about research work—what on earth could they study way off here?"

Graham shook his head.

"I don't know, but it must be pretty desperate to make them take such pains."

"You are right," cut in an ironic voice.

The prisoners fell back, startled. The man with the deathlike eyes had come in silently, and was watching them with grim amusement.

"I'm glad you realize that—it will save us all trouble. And now come with me."

"Wait a minute!" retorted Graham sharply. "Before we go anywhere we want an explanation of this. You have the drop on us just now—but that's no reason for not telling us what we're up against."

The man inclined his head with mock humility.

"If you will just be patient you will get your explanation. And it will not be long, now. I hope I shall not have to use unpleasant means to carry out my—ah—request."

He opened the door with a significant gesture and smiled maliciously as they saw the waiting natives. The castaways followed him without another word.

In a moment they had entered a long room in which nine men sat about a sort of council table. Each one was attired in white and each had that hardness of gaze which characterized the first, a peculiar soullessness of expression that never lifted.

But if these nine seemed evil of face, the hunched and twisted being at the head of the table had the features of a demon. Malignant cruelty played across the distorted lips, while the sinister creases in the hollow cheeks sank so deeply as to appear like twin scars. A strange, hideous pallor, like human flesh under a mercury lamp, gave a horrible suggestion of death. Only the eyes—piercing, burning in their devouring scrutiny—gave hint of the feverish, restless power which animated that sickening, misborn creature. But when he spoke it was in a voice of such dominant power that Graham found himself listening spellbound.

"We have no time to waste with you, for you have interrupted us at a very important moment. Therefore, you must make your choice quickly." He turned to the man who had commanded the natives. "Hayden, have these subjects been instructed?"

The one called Hayden made a low obeisance.

"No, Master, there has been no time. They understand nothing—as yet."

The searing glance passed slowly over Graham's face.

"You seem to be the leader—you will choose first. Your decision may influence the others. Hayden, have him brought to the control room."

Motioning two of the others at the table to follow, the Master swiftly passed through a door at the rear, his misshapen body writhing like that of some repulsive reptile.

Graham entered between two files of guards. He saw that he was in a room at or near the base of the central tower. Glass-enclosed switchboards filled one whole side, and the adjacent one was covered by dials and gages at whose use he could not guess. Before one instrument board was an ominous-looking chair, from which ran insulated cables that connected with cone-shaped fluorescent tubes. Multicolored rays incessantly crackled and hummed through fantastically swirling vapor in these tubes. Thirty feet from this spot was a separate battery of similar tubes, joined by thick cables leading through openings in the wall. Graham surmised that they were connected to the towers he had seen outside.

The Master placed himself before the bewildered flyer, his forbidding face thrust forward in an expression of challenge.

"You have already had proof of my power," he began in his sonorous voice. "But it is clear that you do not understand, so I shall explain. First of all, give up forever any thought that your country can aid you. No one knows where you are—nor would it make any difference if the whole world knew. For within twenty-four hours the world as you know it will cease to exist!"

Graham staggered back in dumb amazement.

"If you doubt what I say, consider the destruction of Guam," the Master went on calmly. "No one but a fool would suppose an earthquake responsible for that. Such a disturbance would affect a much wider area, and it would also leave many drifting objects. There might even be some people to escape. And there were none—except you and your companions, who avoided death only by a freak of chance."

Graham struggled futilely for speech. The Master went on in the manner of one repeating a ritual.

"Guam was but a tiny bit of rock, compared to the continents across the sea, but the force which sent it crumbling to the ocean bottom will just as quickly reduce this entire globe to a mass of water—except for one spot. And that spot is this island."

Graham found his voice at last.

"You are crazy," he cried huskily, breathless from the statement he had just heard. "There could be no force that could destroy land thousands of miles away. You are——"

"Quiet!" commanded the Master sternly. "I tell you I sank that island, and I will sink your miserable country in the same way. Others before you have doubted and have learned the truth. Perhaps you know of the disaster which befell the *Rivaro*—she struck a vertical block on which we were experimenting. Power? Force? Poor fool—you have not the slightest conception of the word. From this room I control the most stupendous power that can ever exist on a single planet."

He stopped for a moment, then continued abruptly, an open contempt making itself evident in his compelling voice.

"In order that your childlike mind can grasp the idea of this force I shall explain further. Do you know what forms the core of this earth? It is a mixture of nickel and iron. Above that are two layers of what scientists call 'sial' and 'sima', which to you would be nothing but rock. The former floats, in a relative sense, in the 'sima', although it seems rigid. Under great force this lighter substance can be made to flow—though ordinarily even the slightest movement takes years."

He paused again, staring fiercely into Graham's puzzled face.

"You are an aviator—I suppose you know something of the earth's magnetism. Probably you think of it as a feeble force which causes errors in ships' compasses, and so forth. Perhaps, also, you have seen iron filings hurl themselves into lines of magnetic force on a sheet of paper, when an electro-magnet was placed beneath the paper. But have you ever thought of what would happen if all the iron in the world suddenly had its polarity completely reversed?"

Graham shook his head dazedly. The Master went on rapidly.

"You would not, of course. You are like all the thick-headed scientists who laughed at my early discoveries. In twenty-four hours they will have laughed for the last time. Look at this map."

He indicated a large map of the world, across which ran fine wires, radiating from a point which Graham saw to be the island.

"Each one of these wires represents an electro-magnetic current induced in specially designed generators, and transmitted, or rather, hurled out from this island on a new conductor I have perfected. It is called feridium, though the name will mean nothing to you. Half of these bands are positive and the others are negative, alternating as they are spaced about the building. For more than two years this current has been passing around the world like invisible hoops of energy, causing the magnetic elements of the earth to arrange themselves in definite lines. Now, the entire globe is in magnetic harmony along the lines we have established. We have also learned how to shorten or lengthen the distance to which our currents are sent by varying the field circuits of the generators concerned. Do you begin to understand, simpleton?"

Graham's mind was reeling. Though he did not comprehend all that the Master was saying, the realization that the fiend before him was not mad was borne strongly upon him. As in some horrible dream he heard that powerful voice proceeding with its incredible revelation.

"What will a reversal of these currents mean? Ah—so your thick brain begins to act! It will mean reversing the polarity of the entire earth—so that all the magnetic elements in the center, under the crustal surfaces, will attempt to adjust themselves instantly. But that would only bring havoc beyond control, probably disruption of the world. I do not wish that, so I have planned a better method, much better. The polarity will be reversed only for a fraction of a second and then will be changed back again. In other words, an alternating current will be transmitted through each feridium band. It will be like shaking the crust of the earth through a giant sieve. Every foot of land will be vibrated and tumbled about with such violence that it will sink to the average level which existed before there were continents—when the globe was covered completely with water. And that average level is far down under the sea!"

The sinister eyes gleamed in anticipation of the horrible cataclysm he had outlined. Graham shuddered.

"We shall be undisturbed because we are at the hub of this wheel of force. For each active propagation of force along a direction line there has been an opposite reaction along the next line. Thus the area directly around us has been kept in stable equilibrium. This ceases as the angles widen. The experiment at the time of the *Rivaro* indicated this, but to be sure I tested my theory by a short-wave reversal covering Guam. You know the result."

Graham was transfixed by a breath-taking horror.

"But why?" he asked in a shaking voice. "Why this wholesale murder of innocent people? And even if you succeed in destroying the world, think of the hundreds of ships that will be left upon the sea. Some of them will find this place and revenge the millions you will have killed."

The Master's bloodless lips twisted into a disdainful smile.

"Do you think that your puny mind can conjure up obstacles I will not have considered—and met? Many of the ships you mention will be caught in the great waves which will rush over the sinking continents. That is why we have had to use this place—so that we would not be in danger. The few ships that escape will sail about aimlessly until their crews and passengers die of starvation. There are few ships which carry enough fuel and supplies to last over a few weeks. When these are gone they will be helpless. Hardly any ships cross the Pacific—and even if one or two should chance to find this island it would only mean a quicker end for those on board. The rays of the sun which drive our motors have also a peculiar way of starting a fire over a long distance. And I have other means of defense, if that should fail. We shall let one year pass so that there will be no chance of any living being or animal except on this island. Then we shall begin the creation of the new world."

Graham's crackling nerves freed themselves at last in a short and terrible laugh.

"The new world! Do you think you are God—to talk of creating worlds?"

A ferocious glare shot over the Master's face.

"God? *There is no God!* Do you hear? I am Master—Master of the world. I alone! And the power which destroys the wrangling, discontented people of today will easily raise up a new world, a better world in which my word will be law."

"A dead world!" shouted Graham, his self-control almost gone. "A world without a human being—only beasts like yourself. What good will it do you to be master of a world like that?"

"Be careful, fool!" stormed the Master, his lips working in growing rage. "You will have no chance to choose."

Jerking his malformed body about, he motioned toward one of his associates.

"Show him a last-stage inanimado. Let him see the thing he will be if he dares to trifle with his Master."

A SLIDING panel moved back along the wall. Graham's eyes dilated as he saw what appeared to be a mummy, standing upright in a glass case. A second look showed it to be the figure of a young man, every feature preserved as perfectly as though life existed. The one who had opened the panel removed a label from the case and held it out.

"Inanimado complete," Graham read stupidly. "Effected July 27, 1923. Due to animate naturally about 2000 unless sooner desired. History: Medico (was assistant surgeon on the *Menocal*). Refused co-operation. To be assigned to third region."

"He refused to become one of us," explained the Master, with grim significance. "He is alive, though he seems to be dead. A tiny spark of life exists in his brain. It could not even be measured—but it is there. A doctor would call this suspended animation. But it is more than that, for he can be kept like this for hundreds of years. When we need him—to teach medicine as I wish it taught in the new world—he will be animated, a certain part of his brain deadened, and he will forget that there has ever been any life before his new one. In the basement of this building are hundreds of these inanimados, both men and women, carefully chosen for some particular talent or knowledge they possess. They were picked from various parts of the world—how we brought them here is nothing to you. They are here—and will form the nucleus of the world to come."

"But you will die before such a world can be more than begun," insisted Graham. "It would take hundreds of years to do all that you intend."

The Master fixed him with a piercing stare. At something back of those glittering eyes Graham shivered involuntarily. For that instant there had been a queer light, something oddly *unhuman* in the hideous face before him.

"Look at me," boomed the deep voice. "As I appear to you this moment, so shall I appear to my subjects five thousand years from now. So may you become—like these you see here, and the men who wait outside. For the inanimado control, which can send you into a state of death for centuries, can as easily supply vitality to your body in excess of that it can use. You will be immune to all ordinary diseases, all ravages of time—nothing but severe wounds can affect you in any way. But I have wasted too much time. Make your choice while I am still in a mood to forgive you the outburst against your Master. Which will it be—power second only to mine in the new world, or"—his glance rested on the waxen features of the figure in the glass case—"to be like him, a mindless slave?"

Graham hesitated, thinking desperately of some way in which to spar for time.

"And Betty—the girl who came with me?" he asked, watching the pallid face of the Master with intent eyes. "If I join you, will you promise that she will not be harmed?"

An expression of deadly menace crossed the shrunken features.

"Choose for yourself alone!" he snarled. "It is not for anyone to question the Master's intent."

Something broke within Graham's mind. In a wild, unreasoning rage he struck out at the repellent face so close to his, throwing all of his pent-up anger into that furious onslaught. Shrieking like a madman, the Master crumpled to the floor.

The next second Graham was the center of a murderous attack by the native guards, who desisted only at a sharp command from Hayden. The other two white men had gone to the assistance of the Master, who lay moaning where he had fallen. Struggling to his feet, he writhed to within a few inches of the flyer, his eyes ablaze with fiendish hatred.

"You have made your choice," he cried thickly. "And as you sink into oblivion take with you the thought that your doll-faced sweetheart will never see you again—unless in centuries ahead, when you pass before her with your memory an utter blank."

Struggling wildly, Graham was dragged to the chair he had already noticed. As heavy clamps shot about his arms and body Hayden placed a light metallic helmet upon his head, its trailing wires dangling across his lap. Plugging the other ends of the

wire into the instrument board, Hayden closed a switch and rotated the rheostat beside it. An unseen motor sprang into life, then came a high-pitched screaming as of a high-tension current breaking across an arc. Gradually the cone-shaped tubes began to take on a sinister glow, at first pink, and finally a bright cherry red.

A dreadful roaring began to sound in Graham's ears, and a swirling dizziness took hold of him. Straining his head forward, he saw that the trailing wires from the helmet lay upon his knee. Jerking suddenly, he caused the wire to fall upon the floor, where it rested close to his foot.

Divining his intention, one of the Master's associates leaped forward quickly. Kicking out vigorously, Graham connected heavily with the man's leg, and he stumbled, falling headlong against the now flaming tubes. There was a deafening crash, an agonizing scream from the tortured wretch as the burning gases seared into his body, and then something snapped in Graham's brain.

2

With almost unbelievable slowness the consciousness of life returned to Stanley Graham. At first it was a vague, insistent something which beat upon his stupefied mind, like a tremendous call from a great distance. Then came a faint perception of weariness, an awareness of a body which ached dully throughout. The torturing heat increased, as though a powerful voice flayed him with its vibrations, though not a sound came to his suddenly listening ears. Against a purely animal fear he fought to open his eyes, succeeding at last with an agonized effort. At first only a blurred vision registered itself, then came a startled impression of seeing, and in that instant his dormant brain resumed thinking.

He was lying in a hollow of rock hardly longer than his body, a hollow oddly regular in its outlines, as though a box had once lain there, to crumble into dust as the substance about it hardened into stone. A bright light penetrated this gloomy prison through a jagged hole a few feet above his head. Twisting sidewise and casting his glance downward, he saw with surprize that his body was caked with a strange gray substance. At his movement it cracked away in several places, leaving his skin bare. He endeavored to sit up but found that his muscles refused to obey his brain.

After several minutes of intense concentration he was able to drag one arm toward his shoulder and prop himself a few inches above the rock floor. It was fully ten minutes before he could attain a sitting position. Exhausted, he leaned against the confining rock and strove to recall what had passed before the moment of his awakening. But in vain. The past was hidden almost as though it had never existed. Yet there must have been something—who was he, and how had he come to be in this gravelike place under the ground?

Discouraged by the utter failure of his memory, he closed his eyes and sank back listlessly. Again came the odd beating at his brain, pounding, hammering until he forced his eyes open and spurred himself to action. Dragging painfully to a kneeling posture, he thrust his head through the opening above.

From a clear blue sky the sun was shining cheerily down at him, as though to encourage him in his laborious efforts. He felt tentatively of the rough edges of the apertures. A small piece broke away at his touch, and he soon found other loose fragments. In a few minutes he was able to stand erect. He was looking down a long, sandy slope, at the bottom of which was a jumble of white stones, suggestive of ancient ruins.

The slope extended a few hundred feet beyond him in the other direction, so that he could not see what lay below the crest.

He crawled out into the sunlight and rested until his first weariness began to leave him. Still with no memory of the past, he rose and wandered unsteadily down the incline. Finding no one among the huge scattered rocks, he was about to retrace his way when the sound of a human voice caused him to halt abruptly. Cautiously approaching the cluster of stone behind which the sound seemed to have come, he peered curiously around the edge.

Seated upon a smooth slab was a handsome youth attired in a peculiar garment of light blue, bearing a huge figure "7" upon its back, and edged about the collar and sleeves with gold braid. His feet were encased in highly polished black boots and on his head was a helmet of stiffened blue cloth, marked with a small insignia.

He seemed to be addressing his bitter remarks to some absent enemy, for there was no one else to be seen. Graham saw that he was in the grip of a powerful emotion, for he was rocking back and forth ceaselessly, his hands clenched and his eyes tightly shut. His words, though in English, were somewhat muffled, so that Graham was unable to understand what he was saying.

STEPPING from his concealment, Graham placed himself before the youth. Opening his eyes, the lad started to his feet in alarm and amazement.

"Who are you?" he gasped, staring wide-eyed at Graham's gray-streaked body.

Graham's attempt at an answer resulted at first only in a silent working of his lips. Then words came, husky and halting, as he sought for a means of expression.

"I — can't seem to — remember. Where am I?"

The youth looked even more dazed.

"Are you blind? Where you find a Seventh Region guard can you doubt that it is the Seventh Region? But what has happened to you? Where is your uniform?"

The rapid rain of questions caused Graham to shake his head blankly.

"Everything is mixed up," he said, placing his hand wearily to his forehead. "I am beginning to remember some things, but they are very hazy."

The youth glanced at him oddly.

"You are not like any regionite I know. How is it that you do not know one of the Master's guards when you see him? Even in the farthermost First Region there is said to be no such ignorance, though the people there are of lowest mentality."

Something clicked at the back of Graham's brain. The Master! Slowly, out of a lifting blanket of darkness, there came before him a sinister face, distorted with hatred. A deep, sonorous voice echoed in his ears.

"This one you call the Master," he cried hoarsely. "Who is he?—where is he now?"

The cheeks of the blue-clad youth paled in swift terror.

"You dare to speak like this? Be careful—I warn you through his power he may know even now——"

With a fierceness borne of his emotion, Graham seized the frightened lad by the shoulder.

"Quick! Answer me!"

"He is Master of the Earthband, of all the counselors, and all regions. Surely you can not have lived on any part of the Earthband without knowing this. His Palace lies in the Central Plaza, in the very middle of the Seventh Region. You can see it from the ridge up there."

"This Earthband," said Graham dazedly: "how long has it existed?"

The youth shook his head uncomprehendingly.

"I do not understand you. The Earthband and the Master have existed forever. But we—his people—were created by him only in recent times. It has been only a little over five hundred years since—why, what is the matter?"

Graham's face had gone ashen and he was trembling visibly.

"Five hundred years," he muttered in a broken voice. "God help me—that fiend has succeeded, and the world is gone."

He fell silent in utter despair. The youth stared down at him with a puzzled frown.

"You speak of 'God' and of a fiend," he observed. "I have never heard of the first, and the Master teaches that fiends die quickly, once they are found out. Either that, or they are sent to the northern boundary of the First Region, where they are forgotten."

Graham roused himself from his apathy.

"Have you no rights of your own?" he inquired. "Must you do everything the Master says?"

A strangely bitter expression came into the youth's face.

"A regionite must never dispute the word of even a sub-counselor," he answered, and there was a sudden hopelessness in his voice. "Even now I am breaking a law in being here. No one is permitted to leave the walls of the Plaza except by order of a counselor."

"Then why are you here?" queried Graham.

The youth searched his face for a long interval before replying.

"You may be a spy—but I do not think so. I will tell you the reason. Perhaps it will help for a little while to talk of my trouble, though nothing can ever help me after tonight.

"My name is Latta, though no regionite's name means anything. We go by numbers and ratings. I am third officer of the Palace Guards, though I would have been a painter of pictures if I had had the right to choose. But all artists and musicians come from the Fourth Region, and such things are forbidden subjects here. Until a short time ago I had no reason to be unhappy, though I have always been different from other regionites I know. Few ever dare to question in their own minds the power by which the counselors and the Master rule over us."

He paused and cast a nervous glance over his shoulder, as though even here he feared being overheard.

"I have always had queer dreams—dreams of being free to do as I wished, but not a person knew of this except Rosita. She understood and sympathized—for we had made our pledges before the sub-counselor and were to be approved in union in a month from yesterday. But now"—his voice faltered and tears sprang to his eyes—"she has been taken from me. Tonight she becomes the chief wife of a counselor."

Dropping down upon the ground, he buried his face in his hands. Graham shook his head sympathetically.

"Isn't there any way around it?" he inquired. "Do you mean that these counselors can pick any woman in their region for a wife?"

"They have many wives," said Latta dully. "All that is necessary is approval of their choice by the Master. My poor Rosita dreads this night as well as I, but she can not change the decree. Even a hint of her feelings would bring great trouble upon her parents, who are faithful regionites. No, there is nothing to do. I came here to be alone—to brace myself against displaying my emotions tonight, when I shall be forced to watch the sacrifice of the one I love."

A question about Betty had been trembling on Graham's lips for some

time, but he gradually realized its hopelessness. Doubtless she had died long ago, if not at the time he had been hurled into inanimation, then in the centuries following. Never would she have assented to the Master's invitation to join in the destruction of the world. A deep sadness came over him as he remembered her winsome features, her merry blue eyes, and the arch way in which she had captivated the heart of every man who saw her. She was gone; and by some unhappy fate he had lived, the only survivor of that other age, except the human beasts who had caused its end.

In the place of his sadness there grew a consuming desire to confront the monster who had brought about this tragedy. Even though it meant his own death it would be worth that supreme sacrifice if he could revenge himself in that last instant on the deformed fiend who had spread his evil life over so many years.

"I can help you," he informed Latta calmly. "I do not promise I can give you the happiness you wish —but I can point the way. It is the only way you and your comrades will ever be other than slaves."

Latta's handsome face took on a glow of excitement.

"Somehow you give me new hope," he exclaimed. "You do not talk like anyone I have ever known. I will do as you say if you think there is any chance of saving my little Rosita."

Graham proceeded quickly.

"Do not question a thing I tell you. I am a being from another world—a world in which your Master means nothing but evil. If there is any way in which I can overthrow him I shall do it. But first you must tell me everything about this Earthband, and the Palace down there, so that I shall know exactly how to plan."

Latta's eyes had widened incredibly at Graham's statement.

"Another world!" he cried. "Then my dreams were not mad, after all. The Earthband history says there is only one world in all space on which beings exist. I have not spoken of this, even to Rosita. But I have stolen out here to watch the night sky and to dream. One night—the last one when I watched the sky—I dreamed of great dark beings that floated slowly down through the sky. It was so real I sprang to my feet looking for them, but there were only clouds above me."

A startling idea came into Graham's mind. Were there airplanes in this Earthband? If so, he might yet obtain one and use it in his revenge. But at his question Latta only looked at him in wonder.

"Airplanes? I know not the word. No, there is nothing that travels through the air. Between regions run speed-tubes, in which cars are shot by air pressure at very great speeds. These are only for officials and transportation of supplies, except when a regionite is transferred to the Palace or the Central Plaza for special service."

"How did you get out here, when you say no one is permitted to leave the Plaza?" demanded Graham.

"There is a passage under the great wall. I found it long ago when inspecting the lowest storerooms. It is hidden behind old boxes, and I think no one else knows of it. At least, it has never been used by anyone but myself since then. I do not know its original purpose."

"Never mind that," said Graham tersely. "We have no time to waste. Tell me as quickly as you can how far this Earthband extends, how the people live, and anything else you can think of. I'll stop you when I don't understand anything."

LATTA began hesitatingly, but soon warmed to his subject. Graham listened carefully, now and then breaking in with a brief question. In an hour he had obtained a fair idea

of the strange new world in which he had awakened.

There now existed but one wide strip of land, running parallel to the equator, and lying above the tropical belt so that all but its most northern edge was in a mild climate. This strip was about two thousand miles wide and was broken at regular intervals, so that the band consisted of seven regions. The rest of the world was water, divided into the expanse of the north, called the North Ocean, and that on the south, called the South Ocean. The entire absence of other land made ships useless. Therefore, all transportation was by speed tubes, as Latta had indicated, in which cars traveled about five hundred miles an hour. Some kind of improved radio communication existed between the Master and his officials, but there was no general broadcasting for the regionites.

The general purpose of all laws and orders was to keep the people under close discipline and ignorant of all matters but their own particular class of work. Study of other subjects was forbidden. Each regionite, man or woman, was compelled to wear uniform clothing indicating his or her status, and each one was tattooed on the left shoulder with an identification number and letter.

Life for the regionites was usually not over forty-five years. Graham conjectured that the Master had managed to control their life span in some way so that he would get the most work from them while they were in their prime. Their early demise would also keep them from gaining too much intelligence with added years, and thus wondering at his right to such great authority and power. How this horrible peonage had been attained he understood when he questioned Latta about other regions. The youth hesitated often, and sometimes confessed to a complete ignorance, though he seemed to be above the average regionite, according to his description of his friends and comrades.

Regionites were not permitted to marry outside of their own region, and all unions were subject to approval of the officials. Money did not exist. Everything was proportioned by credits, which were given for a certain amount of work ordered by the sub-counselor or the counselor.

From one of Latta's comments Graham began to suspect that there was a powerful secret spy system throughout the Earthband, by means of which any regionite suspected of even questioning the Master's right to rule was speedily removed to the barren wastes of the northern First Region and starved to death.

It soon came to him why the Master had refrained from introducing airplanes. As long as the people were isolated and not allowed to communicate on any subjects he could control them, but given the freedom of the air they would soon be united, inevitably to rebel against him. Having never even seen a bird, the regionites would not imagine the possibility of flight.

Afternoon was drawing to a close when Latta concluded his description. Graham found he was beginning to suffer from hunger, which was not strange, he reflected grimly, when he had not eaten for over five hundred years.

"There are two things you will have to do," he told the youth. "You must get me into the Plaza and bring me some food. After that get me a uniform of some sort."

Latta inspected him critically.

"You are right. It would hardly be possible for you to walk through the halls or along the elevations under the Palace without causing curiosity. You are not small enough to wear anything of mine, but I can get the uniform of a guard who was transferred from the Palace. It is after

6 now. As soon as the sun falls, we must hurry in, for there is a full moon tonight. Then, too, this is a great event and I must be there early. The counselors from every region will be guests at the Palace tonight. I have heard, too, that some new proclamation is to be issued. I do not know the nature of it, though."

Graham did not answer him. His mind had gone back over the long years of his deathlike sleep, to a girl with Titian hair, a girl whose cheek showed a mischievous dimple as she smiled up archly at him. A gnawing loneliness came upon him, almost a regret that he had ever awakened from that terrible sleep. For the people of this Earthband were not his people—their minds moved in different ways, and their spirit had been crushed almost before it had begun to take form. He was alone in a strange world, and his heart was aching for a girl who had died five hundred years before.

"REMEMBER the signal," whispered Latta through almost closed lips. "When the bronze bell sounds —that is the Master's coming."

Graham's nod was imperceptible, but under his blue helmet his eyes took on a fierce gleam. Except for this, there was nothing in which he differed from the other guards who stood impassively beside the throne-like dais in the brilliantly lighted courtroom.

He was surreptitiously scanning the throng of richly attired counselors and officials when the great bell pealed a signal note of warning. The hum of conversation ceased instantly. Stiffening into immobility, Graham faced straight ahead, following the action of the other guards.

Slowly a door at the rear of the great room opened, and a procession appeared, flanked by still other guards. Graham's pulses leaped to racing speed as he saw for the second time the malignant features of the man who called himself "Master." His writhing stride was gone, though there was still a suspicion of the hunched and twisted body. Except for this, and an increased appearance of age about his eyes, five centuries seemed to have made little change.

Beside him walked another man, one whose face also was strangely familiar. As he turned slightly toward the guards, Graham saw that it was Hayden. But all this was forgotten as his eyes rested upon two slender, robed figures following with halting steps and downcast eyes. The first was an unusually beautiful girl, with dark hair and a delicate, oval face. But the second was the one at sight of whom Graham almost jumped from his place. For the girl who followed the Master, her fair head bent in despair, was Betty—whom he had given up as dead!

Feverishly intent, he watched her approach, noting with keen anguish the deep sadness upon her lovely face. Then, realizing the danger of a sudden recognition if she should look up, he stolidly glanced away, steeling himself against any suspicious movement or expression. His fatalistic plan to sacrifice himself in killing the Master was quickly forgotten as the little procession moved by him. Why was Betty here at this time? Had she lived in some horrible slavery through all these years?

Half dazed, he listened to a proclamation read by an official as the Master mounted to his seat upon the dais. Slowly a cold horror descended upon him. Betty was to become the Master's consort! She was a superwoman (so read the proclamation) created by the Master to live forever as mistress of the Earthband. And at the same ceremony which effected this union, Hayden would be given the dark-eyed girl, Rosita. At this last, Latta reeled as though struck and his face went a sickly white.

Graham caught his eyes and shook his head in a hurried warning, though the hope which had revived at sight of Betty was giving way to a black despair.

As the mockery of marriage began before the dais, a final determination came to him, inspired by the misery in Betty's fair young face. Against the scores of guards and officials he was absolutely helpless to save her. There was only one way in which he could prevent her becoming the prey of the monster upon the dais.

Feeling cautiously for the dagger which hung at his belt, he closed his eyes in a last agonized prayer for strength to do the thing he planned.

"Oh, God!" he whispered brokenly. "Forgive me—and make her understand!"

As the knife hilt touched his hand he opened his eyes and drew a deep breath. In another moment it would all be over. A bitter sob rose to his lips but he fought it back. Then, before he could make the leap across the intervening space, a curious look on Latta's face drew his attention. The young guard was staring upward, while his lips moved silently. Graham started as he followed the lad's glance through the great, high windows that bordered the side of the vast courtroom. A strange, dark shape was passing across the newly risen moon. While he gazed in astonishment the thing was gone, only to be succeeded by another silhouetted object which descended slowly, almost vertically, like some huge bird.

But there were no birds on the Earthband!

A tremendous excitement possessed him. What had Latta said? "Dark beings floating slowly down through the air!" Had the youth really been dreaming—or was it possible that some near-by planet had established contact with the earth? He shot a hasty look about the assemblage, as a wild plan sprang into his mind. No one but Latta had observed this odd movement in the sky. He stared once more toward the window. No longer was there any doubt. *Something* was descending toward the Palace.

With a triumphant shout he burst through the line of guards and halted, with uplifted dagger, before the dais before any of the amazed onlookers could raise a hand to stop him.

"Stop—or I will destroy you and everyone in this Palace. Look—there is proof of my power!"

Betty had fallen back, startled at his dramatic appearance. As her eyes rested on him she gave a sudden, pitiful little cry and fainted into a little heap. A seething rage had filled the Master's pallid cheeks with a mottled flush, but this was replaced by a look of stark terror as he saw the lowering shadows beyond the Palace. Hayden and the other officials stood dumbly, as though in utter disbelief of what their eyes told them. Even the guards, who had hurriedly started after Graham, stopped to gaze in consternation.

HAYDEN was the first to recover. He dashed to the nearest window and peered upward. When he turned back his features wore a ghastly mask of fear.

"We are lost, Master!" he cried in a dry, crackling tone. "The sky is filled with strange machines——"

An ominous humming broke upon his words, seeming to come from the very room in which they stood. It grew quickly in volume and in a moment an impressive voice sounded with such volume as to set the windows trembling.

"Master of the Earthband," came the solemn words, "the end of your evil rule has come. There is no chance for you to escape. Answer at once by your radotrex system. If you do not surrender within three minutes we shall blast your Palace into ruins."

The voice died into silence. Almost at once a great outcry arose. Indescribable confusion took the place of the quiet order which had prevailed, as counselors and officials fought to gain the doors leading to the entryways. Except for Latta, who had reached Rosita's side, the guards joined in the general stampede. Though the Master's voice boomed out in a lashing fury the panic increased.

After a second of hesitation, Hayden forsook the lone figure upon the dais, but his desertion was fruitless. The Master reached swiftly into his wide robes. His hand reappeared with a tiny instrument.

"Traitor!" he screamed, leveling it at the back of the fleeing counselor. "You will not save yourself that way."

There was a click, a bluish ray shot across the room, and Hayden lay sprawled on the floor, motionless.

At the first sign of disorder Graham had knelt beside Betty and lifted her in his arms. Carrying her tenderly to the rear of the dais, where Latta had hidden Rosita, he hurriedly inquired of the guard the location of the radotrex transmitter.

"In the second room at the rear of the court," whispered Latta. "But look—you can not go there. See! The Master has gone to answer them."

Laughing insanely, the forsaken leader was staggering toward the door at the rear. Graham tightly clutched his dagger and quickly followed. As the Master reached the first room the strange warning voice came once more.

"We shall wait no longer—the three minutes are ended. Your life is ended—and may God have mercy on your black soul!"

Even in that instant of danger and excitement, a thrill of exaltation passed through Graham's mind at the significance of these words. The unknown invaders above knew God!

From outside a peculiar whine grew into a loud shriek. Graham's eyes filled with horror. The Palace was being bombed. Forgetting caution, he dashed into the second room, where the Master leaned over a complicated-appearing device upon a large table.

The fiend at the radotrex straightened up with a snarl, and the death-gun he had used on Hayden was raised in his trembling fingers. Graham threw himself forward, the dagger poised high in the air. In that tense instant there came a terrific crash, seemingly a few yards away, and a leaping flame flared brightly through the windows. With a cry of madness, the Master spun about, just as Graham's descending blade grazed his arm. Then, with a laugh that lived for hours in Graham's memory, he turned the death-gun upon himself and clicked the trigger switch.

After a stupefied second, Graham ran to the radotrex transmitter, which was humming steadily. Evidently the Master had been about to use it when he had entered. Praying that his words would reach the mysterious men above, he spoke rapidly into the glowing disk at the center of the device:

"The Earthband surrenders—the Master is dead. Do not bomb the Palace. Only four people are there ——"

The whine of another bomb was his only answer. Desperately he tried again, shouting into the instrument. And this time the strange voice replied, louder and closer than before.

"We will land—and if there is any sign of treachery the entire city will be destroyed. Clear the central parks so that we can——"

The second bomb struck with a deafening boom, directly upon the Palace terraces. As its shattering pieces hurtled outward, the window casement beside Graham fell in

splinters, loosing a cascade of small stones. He felt a dull blow, a furious ringing in his ears, and then slipped to the floor, while from out of the growing darkness he seemed to hear Betty's voice, crying his name . . . .

When he recovered he was lying on a wide divan, with his head in Betty's lap. She had just finished bandaging the cut upon his forehead. When he opened his eyes she gave a soft cry of relief.

"Oh, Stan—I was afraid you would never come back to me. When I saw you lying there on the floor I thought he"—she gave a shuddering glance across the room—"I was sure he had killed you."

Graham lifted his hand and patted her shoulder reassuringly.

"What has happened?" he asked rather weakly. "How long have I been here?"

"It has been almost fifteen minutes," she told him. "I think they have landed in the parks, for I saw searchlights pointed down that way from the air. But somehow, Stan, I am not afraid. They must be good men—for they came to destroy these evil people of the Earthband."

"They are not all evil—only the counselors and their helpers," said Graham. "But tell me how you came to be here."

"It is all so vague," Betty said slowly. "After the Master told us you had been killed by an accident to his inanimado apparatus, nothing mattered to me. I wanted to die, too, but they put me to sleep—I think the Master intended to revive me in a short time, but something went wrong. I remember nothing else until three days ago. At first I could not understand, but when I found out he was going to make me—marry him"—her voice faltered—"I thought I should go crazy. I prayed that somewhere you would be alive and would come to me. And even at the last minute I did not lose hope, though once I was so frightened I tried to kill myself."

With sudden understanding Graham remembered the insistent pounding at his brain which had awakened him that day. It had been Betty's desperate call which had forced him from that deadly stupor. While he was explaining this, and the circumstances leading up to his confronting the Master, Latta ran into the room, followed by Rosita.

"They are coming into the Palace—the strange men who came in the air. What shall we do?"

Graham struggled to a sitting position.

"What kind of men are they?" he asked eagerly.

"They are huge, with great golden beards," returned Latta excitedly. "Hundreds of them are climbing from wonderful machines which they have brought down into the parks and even in the wider streets. Our people have hidden, except a few who were caught as they ran. But I do not think they have harmed anyone yet."

"Go out and meet them," directed Graham quickly, as a tread of heavy feet resounded through the outer hall. "Don't act as though you were afraid. I think they will be friends."

In a few seconds the young guard returned, nervously escorting a dozen men of unusual stature, whose blond beards and blue eyes immediately reminded Graham of a picture of the ancient Vikings. Each one was dressed in a close-fitting suit of leather, apparently designed to resist extreme cold. At their belts they carried peculiar-looking weapons connected by wires to small, rectangular pouches swung at their hips. The foremost, quite evidently the leader by his stern eyes and striking carriage, stopped the others with a gesture as he saw Betty and Graham.

Then his eyes traveled beyond them to the silent figure upon the floor.

"I am looking for the one who sent the message of surrender," he stated curtly, and in his powerful voice Graham recognized the tone which had echoed so mysteriously through the courtroom.

Graham inclined his head calmly.

"I sent the message. Your coming saved the four of us here from unhappiness—in fact, from death."

Briefly he related the situation which had existed at the moment when the aircraft of the conquerors had first been seen. As he explained the destruction of what had been a thickly populated world the stern eyes lighted curiously and several of the invaders glanced quickly at each other. When he had finished, the blond leader looked down at him with some great emotion on his face. Then, to Graham's intense surprize, he strode forward and clasped his hand in a mighty grip.

"A miracle has indeed taken place," he said with almost a tremor in his resonant voice. "Though all of this was known to us, not one ever dreamed that anyone but our forefathers had escaped the plot of the madman who lies there, dead."

Graham sat bolt upright.

"Your forefathers!" he repeated in amazement. "You mean that you——"

"We are descended from the lost Americans," replied the other solemnly. "In that terrible catastrophe of the Twentieth Century a few thousands were saved by what I have always believed an act of God. The story has been handed down carefully through generations.

"At the last moment, before the force-reversal which wrecked the earth, these demons who planned it could not resist the temptation to gloat over their intended victims. A radio message was broadcast over the entire world, telling of the end of the continents and their people. At first it was thought an ugly joke, but almost at once there began a violent upheaval of land and sea. Except in one spot on the American continent every person perished. I believe there must have been a dead point, considered magnetically, somewhere about the eastern part of Pennsylvania. Either that, or there was a deep fault in the earth's crust. At any rate, an irregular bit of land, hardly as large as the state I mentioned, was shifted laterally hundreds of miles northward by the same force which sank all the rest of the land. As it shifted it also rose until it stood high above the surrounding seas. Our ancestors found themselves hurled into the bitter climate of the Arctic, though at that time they supposed some freak of nature had suddenly changed the temperature of the latitude where they had lived.

"Many died before they could adjust themselves to the rigors of that awful cold, but finally one mighty man took charge and brought hope out of fear and despair. In the years that followed these courageous souls struggled to overcome the handicap of nature, and to rebuild the civilization which had so nearly vanished. The centuries gradually produced a hardy race equipped both physically and mentally to survive the trials of the far North. And all through these centuries there has been one purpose: to become powerful enough to explore the lonely seas surrounding us and learn the secret of that which our history named 'The Destruction'."

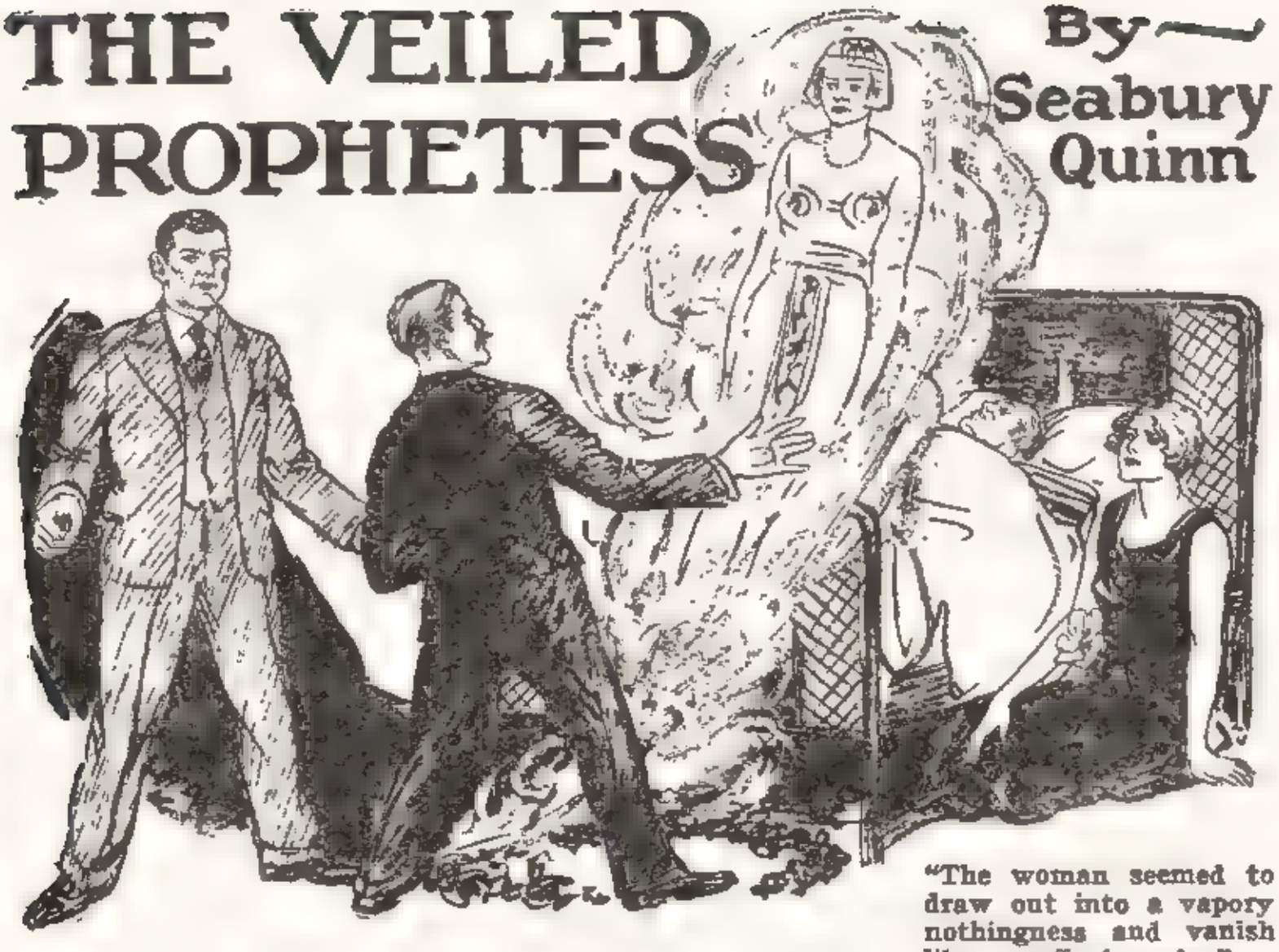
He paused in his astounding tale, while Betty and Graham stared at each other with incredulous eyes. The blond commander smiled.

"It is hard to believe, I know. But it is true. Three centuries passed before we knew—or rather, our ances-

(Continued on page 714)

THE VEILED PROPHETESS

By—
Seabury Quinn



"The woman seemed to draw out into a vapory nothingness and vanish like a puff of smoke."

"BUT, *Madame,* what you say is incredible," Jules de Grandin was saying to a fashionably dressed young woman as I returned to the consulting room from my morning round of calls.

"It may be incredible," the visitor admitted, "but it's so, just the same. I tell you she was there."

"Ah, Trowbridge, *mon cher,*" de Grandin leaped up as he beheld me in the doorway, "this is Madame Penneman. She has a remarkable story to tell.

"*Madame,*" he bowed ceremoniously to our caller, "will you have the goodness to relate your case to Dr. Trowbridge? He will be interested."

The young lady crossed her slender, gray-silk clad legs, adjusted her abbreviated black-satin dress in a manner to cover at least a portion of her patellæ, and regarded me with the fixed, dreamy stare of a pupil reciting a lesson learned by rote.

"My name is Naomi Penneman," she began; "my husband is Benjamin Penneman, of the chocolate importing firm of Penneman & Brixton. We have been married six months, and came to live in Harrisonville when we returned from our honeymoon trip, three months ago. We have the Barton place in Tunlaw Street."

"Yes?" I murmured.

"I heard of Dr. de Grandin through Mrs. Norman—she said he did a wonderful piece of work in rescuing her daughter Esther from some horrible old man—so I brought my case to you. I wouldn't dare go to the police with it."

"U'm?" I murmured. "Just what——"

"It's about my husband," she

went on, without giving me time to form my query. "There's a woman —or something—trying to take him away from me!"

"Well—er—my dear young lady, don't you think you would better have consulted a lawyer?" I objected. "Physicians sometimes undertake to patch up leaky hearts, but they are scarcely in the business of repairing outraged affections, you know."

"*Mais non,* Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin denied with a delighted chuckle, "you do misapprehend *Madame's* statement. Me, I think perhaps she speaks advisedly when she does say 'a woman *or something*' designs to alienate her husband.

"Proceed, *Madame,* if you please."

"I graduated from Barnard in '24," Mrs. Penneman took up her statement, "and married Ben last year. We went on a ninety-day cruise for our wedding tour, and moved here as soon as we came back.

"Our class had a reunion at the Allenton Thursday of Christmas week, and some of the girls were crazy about Madame Naîra, the Veiled Prophetess, a fortune-teller up in East Eighty-second Street. They talked about her so much the rest of us decided to pay her a call.

"I was afraid to go by myself, so I teased Ben, my husband, into going with me, and—and he's been acting queer ever since."

"Queer?" I echoed. "How?"

"Well"—she made a vague sort of gesture with one of her small, well-manicured hands and flushed slightly—"you know, Doctor, when two people have been married only six months the star-dust oughtn't to be rubbed off the wings of romance, ought it? Yet Ben's been cooler and cooler to me, commencing almost immediately after we went to see that horrid woman."

"You mean——"

"Oh, it's hard to put into words. Just little things, you know; none of them important in themselves, but pretty big in the aggregate. He forgets to kiss me good-bye in the morning, stays over in New York late at night—sometimes without calling me up to let me know he won't be home —and breaks engagements to take me places without warning. Then, when I expostulate, he pleads business."

"But my dear madame," I protested, "this is certainly no case for us. Not every man has the capacity for retaining romance after marriage. Mighty few of them have, I imagine. And it may easily be exactly as your husband says: his business may require his presence in New York at nights. Be reasonable, my dear; when you were first married, he might have strained a point to be home while dinner was still hot, and let his partners handle matters, but you're really old married folks now, you know, and he has to make a living for you both. You'd best let me give you a bromide—this thing may have gotten on your nerves—and go home and forget your silly suspicions."

"And will the bromide keep her—or it—out of my house—out of my bedroom—at night?" Mrs. Penneman asked.

"Eh, what's that?" I demanded.

"That's what made me call on Dr. de Grandin," she replied. "It was bad enough when Ben took to neglecting me, but on the second of last month, while we were in bed, *I saw a woman in our room.*"

"A woman—in your bedroom?" I asked. The story seemed more sordid than I had at first supposed.

"Well, if it wasn't a woman it was something in the shape of one," she replied. "I'd been pretty much upset by Ben's actions, and had reproached him pretty severely the Sunday before when he didn't show up to take me from the Ambersons'

reception, and he'd promised to reform.

"He did, too. For four nights, from Monday to Thursday, he'd been home to dinner on time, and Thursday night—the second—we'd been to the theater over in New York. We went to a night club after the play and came back on the owl train. It must have been 1 o'clock before we got home. I was awfully tired and went to bed just as soon as I could get my clothes off; but Ben was in bed first, and was sound asleep when I got into mine.

"I was just dropping off when I happened to remember he hadn't kissed me good night—we'd rather gotten out of the habit during the last few weeks.

"I turned my covers back and was in the act of getting out of bed to lean over Ben and kiss him, when I noticed he was moaning, or talking in his sleep. Just as I put my feet to the floor, I heard him say, 'Second, Second!' twice, just like that, and put his hands out, as if he were pushing something away from him.

"Then I saw *her*. All at once she was standing by the door of our room, smiling at him like—like a cat smiling at a bird, if you can imagine such a thing—and walking toward him with her arms outstretched.

"I thought I was dreaming, but I wasn't. I tell you, I saw her. She walked across the rug and stood beside him, looking down with that queer, catty smile of hers, and took both his hands in hers. He sat up in bed, and looked at her like—as he used to look at me when we were first married!

"I was spellbound for a moment, then I said, 'Dream or no dream, she shan't have him!' and leaped to my feet. The woman loosed one of her hands from Ben's and pointed her finger at me, smiling that same awful, calm smile all the time.

"'Woman,' she said, 'get you gone. This man is mine, bound to me forever. He has put you away and wedded me. Be off!' That's just what she said, speaking in a sort of throaty voice—and then she went away."

"How do you mean, 'went away'?" I asked. "Did she vanish?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Penneman answered. "I couldn't say whether she actually vanished or faded out like a motion picture or went through the door. She just wasn't there when I looked again."

"And your husband?"

"He fell right back on the pillows and went to sleep. I had to shake him in order to wake him up."

"Shamming?"

"No-o, I don't think so. He really seemed asleep, and he didn't seem to know anything about the woman when I asked him."

"U'm?" I gave de Grandin a quick look, but there was no gleam of agreement in his round blue eyes as they encountered mine.

"Proceed, *Madame*, if you please," he urged with a nod at our caller.

"She's been back three times since then," Mrs. Penneman said, "and each time she has warned me to leave. The last time—night before last—she threatened me. Said she would wither me if I did not go."

"Tell me, *Madame*," de Grandin broke in, "is there any condition precedent to this strange visitant's appearance?"

"I—I don't believe I understand," the girl replied.

"Any particular conduct on your husband's part which would seem to herald her approach? Does he show any signs? Or, perhaps, do you have any feelings of apprehension or presentiment before she comes?"

"No-o," Mrs. Penneman answered thoughtfully, "no, I can't say that—wait a moment!—yes! Every time she's come it's been after a period of

reformation on Ben's part, after he's been attentive to me for several days. As long as he's indifferent to me she stays away, but each time he begins to be his old, dear self, she makes her appearance, always very late at night or early in the morning, and always with the same command for me to leave.

"One thing more, Doctor. The last time she told me to go—the time she threatened me—I noticed Ben's seal ring on her finger."

"Eh, what is that?" de Grandin snapped. "His ring? How?"

"He lost his ring when we went to visit Madame Naîra. I'm sure he did, though he declares he didn't. It was a class ring with the seal of the university on it and his class numerals imposed on the seal."

"And how came he to lose it, if you please?"

"He was clowning," the girl answered. "Ben was always acting like a comedian in the old days, and he was showing off when we went to the Veiled Prophetess' that day. Really, I think the place rather impressed him and he was like a little boy whistling his way past the graveyard when he acted like a buffoon. The place was awfully weird, with a lot of Eastern bric-a-brac in the reception room where we waited for the Prophetess to see us. Ben went all around, examining everything, and seemed especially taken with the statue of a woman with a cat's head. The thing was almost life-size, and shaped something like a mummy—it gave me the creeps, really. Ben put his hat—he was wearing a derby that day—on its head, and then slipped his seal ring on its finger. Just then the door to the Prophetess' consulting room opened, and Ben snatched his hat off the thing's head in a hurry, but I'm sure he didn't get his ring back. We were ushered into the fortune-teller's place immediately, and went out by another door, and we were so full of the stuff she'd told us that neither of us missed the ring till we were on the train coming home.

"Ben 'phoned her place next day, but they said no such ring had been found. He didn't like to confess he'd put it on the statue's finger, so he told them he must have dropped it on the floor."

"Ah?" de Grandin drew a pad of paper and a pencil toward him and scribbled a note. "And what did she tell you, this Madame Veiled Prophetess Naîra, if you please, *Madame?*"

"Oh"—the girl spread her hands—"the usual patter the fortune-tellers have. Recited my history fairly accurately, told me I'd been to Egypt—nothing wonderful in that; I was wearing a scarab Ben bought me in Cairo—and ended up with some nonsense about my having to make a big sacrifice in the near future that others might have happiness and destiny be fulfilled."

She paused, a rosy flush suffusing her face. "That frightened us a little," she confessed, "because, when she said that, we both thought maybe she meant I was going to die when—well, you see——"

"Perfectly, *Madame,*" de Grandin nodded with quick understanding. "Mankind is perpetuated by woman's going into the Valley of the Shadow of Death to fetch up new lives. Fear not, dear lady, I do assure you the Prophetess meant something quite otherwise."

"And you will help me?" she begged. "Dr. de Grandin, I—I am going to do what you said about the Valley of the Shadow this spring, and I want my husband. He is my man, my mate, and no one—*no thing*—shall take him from me. Can you make her go away? Please?"

"I shall try, *Madame,*" the little Frenchman answered gently. "I can not say I quite understand every-

thing—yet—but I shall make your case my study. *Parbleu,* but I shall sleep not until I have reached a working hypothesis!"

"Oh, thank you; thank you!" the young matron exclaimed. "I feel ever so much easier already."

"But of course," de Grandin acquiesced, bending a smile of singular sweetness on her, "that is as it should be, *ma chère.*" He raised her fingers to his lips before escorting her from the room.

"And now, Friend Trowbridge, what do you think of our case?" he demanded when the front door had closed behind our caller.

"Since you ask me," I answered with brutal frankness, "I don't know who's the crazier, Mrs. Penneman or you; but I think you are, for you should know better. You know as well as I that illusions and hallucinations are apt to occur at any time during the puerperal period. This is a clear case of mild manic-depressive insanity. Because of her condition this poor child has construed her husband's absorption in his business as neglect. She's a psychic type, reacting readily to external stimuli, and in her state of depression she thinks his love has failed. That's preyed on her mind till she's on the borderline of insanity, and you were very unkind to humor her in her delusions."

He rested his elbows on the desk, cupping his little pointed chin in his hands, and puffed furiously on his cigarette till its acrid, unpleasant smoke surrounded his sleek blond head in a gray nimbus. "*O, la, la,* hear him!" he chuckled. "Suppose, Trowbridge, *mon vieux,* I were to say I do not consider *la belle* Penneman mad at all. Not even one little bit. What then?"

"Humph!" I returned. "I dare say you'd have agreed with her if she'd said that statue her husband put his ring on had come to life?"

"Perhaps," he returned with an irritating grin. "Before we are through with this case, my friend, we may see stranger things than that."

Two days later he announced matter-of-factly, "Today, Friend Trowbridge, we go to interview this Madame Naîra, the Prophetess of the Veil."

"We?" I responded. "Perhaps you do, but I'll have nothing to do with the matter."

"*Pardieu,* but you will!" he replied with a laugh. "This case, my friend, promises as much adventure as any you and I have had together. Come, a spice of the unusual will be a tonic for you after an uneventful season of house-to-house calls."

"Oh, all right," I agreed grudgingly. "I'll go along, but I want you to know I don't countenance any of this foolishness. What Mrs. Penneman needs is a nerve specialist, not this clowning we're going through."

Madame Naîra's atelier in East Eighty-second Street spoke volumes for the public's credulity. It was one of the old-fashioned brownstone front residences of two generations ago, located within a pebble's toss of Central Park, and worth its square footage in gold coin. Outside it was as like its neighbors in the block as one pea is like its fellows in the pod. Within it was a perfect example of good taste and expensive furnishings. A butler bearing all the hall-marks of having served in at least a duke's household, staidly resplendent in correct cutaway coat and striped trousers, admitted us and took the cards de Grandin handed him, inspecting them with minute care, accepted the Prophetess' fee (payable strictly in advance) and ushered us into a large and luxuriously furnished parlor.

"See here," I began as we seated ourselves in a pair of richly upholstered chairs, "if you expect to——"

A violent grimace on the Frenchman's face warned me to silence. Next moment he rose, remarking, "What a beautiful room we have here, my friend," and sauntered about, admiring the handsome pictures on the walls. Passing my chair he seated himself on its arm and slapped me jovially on the back, then bent close and whispered fiercely in my ear: "No talk, Friend Trowbridge; already I have discovered dictographs concealed behind nearly every picture, and I know not if they have periscope peepholes to enable them to watch us as well. Caution! I had a friend at the French consulate make the appointment for us in his name, and I am Alphonse Charres, while you have assumed the rôle of William Tindell, an attorney. Remember."

Humming a snatch of tune he began a second circuit of the room.

Before he had completed his trip a slender, dark-skinned young man in flowing blue linen robes and a huge turban of red and yellow silk appeared almost as if by magic in the drawing room doorway, beckoning us with a thin bamboo cane which he bore like a badge of office.

Casting me the flicker of a wink de Grandin fell in step behind him and followed up the stairs.

The ground floor drawing room where we had first cooled our heels was a perfect example of Occidental elegance in furniture and appointments. The room into which we were now shown was a riot of Oriental extravagance. Rugs of hues and patterns as gorgeous as the plumage of paradise birds were strewn over the floor, in some cases three deep, the plaster walls were painted in glaring reproductions of Egyptian temple scenes, and fitted here and there with niches in which stood statues of plaster, stone or metal, many of them enameled in brilliant colors.

The only article of furniture in the apartment was a long crescent-shaped bench or settee of some dark wood thickly encrusted with mother-of-pearl inlays, which stood almost in the center of the room and faced what appeared to be the entrance to another chamber.

This entrance was constructed in the form of a temple gateway, or, it seemed to me, the door to a mausoleum. Plaster blocks, made to imitate stone, had been laid like a wall about it, and on each side of the opening there rose straight, thick columns topped with lotus capitals, while a slab of flat stone reached between them, forming the pediment of the doorway. On this was engraved the Egyptian symbol of the solar disk, vulture wings spreading from right and left of it. To the left of the door crouched a terra cotta androsphinx, while on the right stood a queer-looking statue representing a woman swathed in mummy bands about her lower body, naked from the waist upward, and having the head of a lioness set upon her shoulders. One hand she held against her rather prominent bosom, grasping an instrument something like an undersized tennis racket, only, instead of strings, the open oval of the racket was fitted with transverse horizontal bars on which rows of little bells hung. The other hand was extended as though bestowing a blessing, the long, tapering fingers widely separated.

I did not like the thing's looks. Involuntarily, even though I knew it to be only a lifeless piece of plaster and papier-mâché, I shuddered as I looked at it, and felt easier when my gaze rested elsewhere.

Straight before us the entrance to the next room opened between the pillars of the temple door. The doorway was fitted with two gates of iron grillwork, heavily gilded; behind the arabesqued iron hung curtains of royal purple silk.

At a sign from the usher we seated ourselves on the inlaid bench and faced the closed iron lattice.

"*Assez!*" de Grandin exclaimed in an irritable voice, "When you have done inspecting us, *Madame,* kindly have the goodness to admit us. We have urgent business elsewhere." To me he whispered: "They do peer at us through the meshes of the curtain! *Mordieu,* are we beasts at the menagerie to be stared at thus?"

As though in answer to his protest the lights in the room began to grow dimmer, a deep-toned gong sounded somewhere beyond the iron gates, and the grilled doors swung back, disclosing a darkened room beyond.

"Enter!" a deep, sepulchral voice bade us, and we stepped across the threshold of Madame Naîra's consultation room.

THE place was pitch-dark, for the purple curtain fell behind us, shutting out all light from the room we had left. I stood stock-still, attempting vainly to pierce the enveloping darkness with my gaze, and it seemed as though an icy wind were blowing on my face, a chilling wind, like the draft from a long-disused tunnel. Subtly, too, the odor of sandalwood and acrid tang of frankincense was wafted to my nostrils, and in the darkness before me the faint, phosphorescent glow of a cold green-blue light became visible.

Slowly the luminosity spread, gradually taking form. Through the dark it shone, cold and hard as a far-distant star viewed on a frosty night, assuming the shape of an ancient coffin. Now the effulgence gained in strength till we could make out an upright figure in the mummy case; the figure of a woman, garbed in a straight-hanging robe of silk tissue thickly sewn with silver sequins. Her hands were crossed above her breast and her face was bowed upon them so that all we could observe at first was the whiteness of her arms and shoulders and the blackness of her hair, piled coil on coil in a high coronal. As the light increased we saw her bare feet rested on the center of a horizontal crescent moon, the horns of which extended upward on each side of her.

The breeze which blew through the dark increased its force. We could hear the flutter of the silken curtain behind us as the Prophetess raised her head and stepped majestically from her coffin, advancing toward us with a lithe, silent movement which somehow reminded me of the tread of a great, graceful leopardess.

By now the increasing light enabled us to see the woman's face was hidden in a sequin-spangled veil of the same material as her robe, and that her brows were bound with a diadem of blue-green enamel fashioned in the form of a pair of backward-bent hawk wings and bearing the circular symbol of the sun at its center.

"*Morbleu,*" I heard de Grandin murmur, "are we at the circus, perhaps?"

Seemingly unaware of our presence, the veiled woman glided noiselessly across the room till she stood a scant two yards from us, extended one of her white, jewel-decked arms and motioned us to be seated. Simultaneously a crystal sphere suddenly appeared in the dark before her, glowing with cold inward fire like a monster opal, and she sank to rest in a carved chair, her long, sinuous hands hovering and darting in fantastic gestures about and above the crystal. On each fore- and little finger there gleamed a green-jeweled ring, so that her writhing hands looked for all the world like a pair of green-eyed serpents weaving a saraband in the purple dark.

"I see," she intoned in a rich contralto voice, "I see a man who vaunts his learning; a man who dares pit his

puny strength against the powers which were old when Kronos himself was young. I warn that man to meddle not with what does not concern him. I warn him not to interfere in behalf of the wife who has been put away, or cross the path of one who draws her strength from the ancient goddess of Bubastis.

"Away with you, rash upstart"—one of her long, jeweled hands suddenly rose and pointed through the shadows at de Grandin—"back to your test-tubes and your retorts, your puny science and punier learning. Go give your aid to the sick and the ailing, but espouse not the cause of the woman who has been cursed by Bast, or your life shall pay the forfeit!"

Like the closing of an eyelid the light in the crystal and the paler light about the mummy case went out, leaving the room in total blackness. There came a greater gust of air than any we had yet felt, and with it an overpowering, cloying sweetness which stifled our breath and made our eyes smart like fumes from burning pepper.

"Seize her, Friend Trowbridge!" I heard de Grandin cry, then fall to coughing and gasping as the sharp, penetrating fumes attacked his mucous membranes. Something more potent than the darkness blotted out my sight, bringing hot tears to my eyes and smothering the answering hail I would have given. About me the gloom seemed filled with tiny shimmering star-points of wicked, dancing light. I reached blindly for the spot where the veiled woman had sat, encountered only empty space, and fell forward on my face, wrenched and racked with a fit of uncontrollable coughing.

Somewhere, far, far away, a light was shining, and in the greater distance a voice was calling my name, thinly, ineffectually, like a voice heard dimly in a dream. I sat up, rubbing my stinging eyes, and stared about me. The light which danced and flickered overhead was a city street lamp, and the voice ringing faintly in my ears was the voice of Jules de Grandin. We were sitting, the pair of us, on the curb of East Eighty-second Street, the arc-light laughing down at us through the cold, frosty air of the winter evening. Neither of us had hat or overcoat, and de Grandin's thin, white face was already pinched with cold.

"*Nom d'un colimaçon; nom d'un coq; nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu!*" he chattered through rattling teeth. "They have made of us one pair of fools, Friend Trowbridge. They have taken us as the fisherman takes the fish of April. Jules de Grandin, you are no more worthy to regard yourself in the mirror!"

"Whew!" I breathed, clearing my lungs of the fumes which still hung in them. "That was as sharp a trick as I ever saw, de Grandin. There must have been enough chloroform mixed with that incense to have put a dozen men away!" I got unsteadily to my feet and looked about me. We were a good two blocks from the house where Madame Naïra had hoodwinked us so neatly, though how we came there was more than I knew.

"*Parbleu,* yes," he agreed, rising and buttoning his jacket over his breast. "We were unconscious before we could so much as call the name of that Monsieur Jacques Robinson! Meantime, I famish with the cold. Can we not obtain suitable clothing?"

"H'm," I answered, "it's too late for any of the regular shops to be open, but we might get something to tide us over at one of the second-hand places in Third Avenue."

"Ha, is it so?" he replied. "By all means, then, let us do so at once, right away, immediately. *Mordieu,* me, I am likely to become a snow man at any minute. *Allons!*"

A Hebrew gentleman who dealt in cast-off garments eyed us suspiciously when we entered his musty emporium of relics, but the sight of our money quickly quieted any misgivings he might have entertained, and within half an hour, togged out in garments which almost sent their vendor into fits at their beauty and general excellence, we were seated in a taxicab proceeding toward the railway station.

"WELL," I teased as we concluded our dinner that night, "you saw your Veiled Prophetess. Are you satisfied?"

"Satisfied!" He gave me a glare beside which the fabled basilisk's worst would have been a melting love-glance. "*Pardieu,* we shall see who shall make *un sacré singe* out of whom before we are through! That woman—that adventuress! She did warn me not to meddle in what was not my affair. *Nom d'un veau noir,* and is not a five-hundred-franc overcoat, to say nothing whatever of a hundred-franc hat, which she stole from me—are they, perhaps, not my affair? *Morbleu,* I shall say they are, my friend! *Mais oui,* I shall make that fortune-teller of the veil eat her words. *Cordieu,* but she shall eat them to the last crumb, nor will they prove a palatable meal for her, either!"

"You've got to admit she drew first blood, anyhow," I replied with a laugh.

"That is true," he agreed, nodding gravely, "but attend me, my friend, he bleeds best who bleeds last, I do assure you."

He was moody as a bear with a sore head all evening, and morose to the point of surliness the next day. Toward noon he took his hat and coat and left the house abruptly. "I shall return when I come back," he told me as he hastened down the steps.

It was long after dinner time when he put in an appearance, but his face wore its usual complacent expression, and, though his eyes twinkled now and again with elfish laughter, I could not get him to tell me of his adventures during the day.

EARLY next morning he left the house on another mysterious errand, and the same thing occurred each day during the week. The following Monday he suddenly insisted on my accompanying him to New York, and, at his direction, we took a taxicab from the Hudson Terminal and drove northward to Columbus Circle, turning in at the entrance of Central Park.

"Ah ha, my friend," he replied when I urged him to explain our errand, "you shall see what you shall see, and it shall be worth seeing."

Presently, as we proceeded toward Cleopatra's Needle, he gave me a sharp nudge in the ribs. "Observe that *moteur* yonder, my friend," he commanded, "that one of the color of pea soup. Regard the driver and his companion, if you please."

Our taxi leaped ahead at his sudden command to the driver, and we passed a long, low sport-model roadster driven by a young man in a heavy raccoon ulster. There was nothing remarkable about the fellow, except that he seemed more than commonly pleased with himself, but I was forced to admit that it was worth our trip to the city to view his companion. She was dark, dark with that mysterious, compelling beauty not possessed by one woman in a thousand. Despite the chill of the winter wind her cheeks showed not a touch of color, but were pale with the rich, creamy tint of old parchment, which made her vivid red lips seem all the more brilliant. Her head was small and finely poised, and fitted with a cap of some tawny-hued fur which nestled snugly to her blue-

black hair with the tightness of a turban. Her eyes were long and narrow and of that peculiar shade of hazel which defies exact classification, being sometimes topaz-brown, sometimes sea-green. Her lips were full, passionate and brightly rouged, and her long, oval face and prominent cheekbones gave her a decidedly Oriental appearance. Patrician she looked, even royal, and mysterious as night-veiled Isis herself. A collar of tawny fur frothed about her slender bare throat, and her shoulders were covered by a coat of some smooth, mustard-colored pelage which glistened in the morning sunlight like the back of a seal just emerged from the water.

"By George, she's a beauty," I admitted, "but——"

"Yes?" de Grandin elevated his brows interrogatively. "You did say 'but,' my friend?"

"I was thinking I wouldn't care to have her enmity," I replied. "Her claws seem a bit too near the surface, and I'll warrant they're sharp, too."

"*Eh bien,* you should know, *mon vieux,*" he replied with a chuckle. "You have felt them."

"What—you mean——?"

"Nothing less. The lady is none other than our friend, Madame Naîra, the Veiled Prophetess."

"And the man——?"

"Is Benjamin Penneman, the husband of our client, Madame Penneman."

"Oh, so he *is* running about with Madame Naîra?" I replied. "His poor little wife——"

"Will have him back, and on his knees, to boot, or Jules de Grandin is a greater fool than Madame Naîra made of him the other night," he cut in. "Attend me, Friend Trowbridge. After our so humiliating fiasco at the house of the Prophetess that night, I was like a caged beast who sees her young slain before her eyes. Only desire for revenge actuated me, and I could not think clearly for my madness. Then I calmed myself. 'Jules de Grandin, you great zany,' I said to me, 'if you are to overcome the enemy, you must think, and to think you must have the clear brain. Control yourself.'

"And so I did. I went to New York and proceeded to play detective on the trail of this unfaithful husband. Where he went I went. When he stopped I stopped. *Parbleu,* but he led me a merry chase! He is active, that one.

"At last, however, my patience reaped its deserved reward. I did see him go to that accursed house in Eighty-second Street and come out with that woman. Again and again I did follow him, and always my trail led to the same burrow. '*Triomphe!*' I told me. 'We have at last established this lady's identity.' Today I did but bring you to see her that you might recognize her face without its veil. Tonight we begin our work of turning her temporary victory into crushing defeat."

"How are you going to pay her off?" I asked. "Name her as corespondent in a divorce suit?"

"*Non, non, non!*" he grinned at me. "All in good time, my friend. I have first planned my work; you shall now observe me as I work my plan. This very night I do begin." Nor could I get any further information from him.

For three consecutive nights de Grandin watched our telephone as a cat mounts vigil over a rat-hole. On the fourth night, as we were preparing to go upstairs to bed, the bell rang, and he snatched the receiver from the hook before the little clapper had ceased to vibrate against the gongs.

"*Allo, allo!*" he called excitedly through the mouthpiece. "But yes; most certainly. Immediately, at once, right away!

"Trowbridge, my friend, come with me. Come and see the game we have caught in our trap. Death of my life, but that Madame Penneman is one clever woman!"

Waving away my questions, he hustled me into hat and coat and fairly dragged me to the automobile, urging more and more speed as we bowled along the road to the Penneman house.

Disdaining to knock, he burst the front door open and hurried up the stairs, turning unerringly down the upper hall and pushing open the first door to the right.

An amazing scene greeted us. The room was a tastefully furnished bedchamber, pieces of mahogany, well chosen rugs and shaded lamps giving it the air of intimacy such apartments have at their best. Against the farther wall, opposite the dressing table, stood a pair of twin beds, and on the nearer one lay the pajama-clad form of the young man we had seen driving in the park a few days before. Obviously, he was asleep, and quite as obviously his sleep was troubled, for he tossed and moaned restlessly, turning his head from side to side on the pillow, and once or twice attempting to rise to a sitting posture.

In the niche beside the windows, beside the telephone table, crouched Mrs. Penneman, clad in a negligée of orchid silk, her frightened eyes turning now on her sleeping husband, now on something which occupied the center of the room.

I followed her gaze as it swerved from the man on the bed and gasped in astonishment, then rubbed my eyes in wonder and gasped again. A circle of holly leaves, some six feet in diameter, lay upon the rug, and within it, half nebulous, like a ghost, but plainly visible, cowered the form of Madame Naîra, the Veiled Prophetess. She was clad as we had first seen her, in a diaphanous one-piece garment of midnight blue silk encrusted with tiny bright metal plates, and on her head was the crown of Egypt's royalty. But the veil was gone from her face, and if ever I beheld loathsome, inhuman hatred on human countenance, it sat upon the beautiful features of the fortune-teller. Her green eyes were no longer narrow, but opened to their greatest compass, round and flashing with fury, and her red mouth was squared like the grimacing of an old Greek tragic mask or those hideous carved heads made by the natives of Fiji. Now she extended her hands, long, slender and red-nailed, and now she beat her breasts with clenched fists. Again she opened her vivid lips and emitted gurgling sounds like the moanings of an enraged cat, or hissed with a sibilant, spitting noise, as though she were in very truth a cat and no woman at all.

"*Très bien, Madame,*" de Grandin bowed to Mrs. Penneman, "I see you have caught the marauder."

He turned nonchalantly to the hissing fury inside the circle of holly leaves. "I believe you did warn me not to pit my strength—my puny strength — against one who drew her power from the goddess of Bubastis?" he asked mockingly. "You have some further warnings to give, *n'est-ce-pas, Madame?*"

"Let me go; let me go!" she begged, stretching her hands out to him supplicatingly.

"Eh, what is this? You do beg deliverance of me?" he replied in mock misunderstanding. "Were you not about to forfeit my so worthless life if I continued to espouse the cause of the wife who had been put away? *Eh bien,* Madame Cat, you purr a different tune tonight, it would seem."

"Benjamin, Benjamin," the prisoned woman screamed. "Help me, my husband, my lover! See, by the

ring I hold you with, I implore your aid!"

The man on the bed stirred uneasily and moaned in his sleep, but did not wake or rise.

"I fear my puny science has bested you, Madame Cat," de Grandin put in. "Your husband-lover is bound in a spell which I did conjure up from a bottle, and not all your magic can overcome it. Seek no help from him. I, Jules de Grandin, rule here!"

With that his cloak of sarcasm fell from him, and he faced her with a visage as savage and implacable as her own. "You—you would come into honest women's houses and take their men!" he fairly spat at her. "You would thrust your unclean magic between a man and the mother-to-be of his child! You—*mordieu*—you would steal the hat and coat of Jules de Grandin! Look not for mercy from me. Till cock-crow I shall hold you here, and then——" He elevated his shoulders in an expressive shrug.

"No, no; not that!" she begged, and her voice sank from a wail to a whimper. "See, I will give back his ring. I will release him from my charm—only let me go; let me go!"

"I make no promises to such as you," he responded, but the self-satisfied twinkle in his little blue eyes, and the half-checked gesture of his right hand as it rose to caress his trimly waxed blond mustache betrayed him.

The woman redoubled her entreaties. She sank to her knees and lowered her forehead to the floor. "Master!" she exclaimed. "I am your slave, your conquest. You have won. Show me mercy, and I will swear by the head of Bast, my mother, never to trouble this man or this woman again!"

"*Tiens,*" this time his hand would not be denied. It rose automatically to his mustache and tweaked the waxed end viciously. "Give back the ring, then, and go in peace. And make sure that you send us those hats and those overcoats which you did so unwisely steal from us."

She tossed a heavy gold seal ring across the intervening hedge of holly, and de Grandin bent forward, retrieving the trinket, before he displaced one of the green twigs with the toe of his boot.

There was a noise like steam escaping from an overheated teakettle, and the woman on the floor seemed suddenly to elongate, to draw out into a vapory nothingness, and vanish like a puff of smoke before a freshening breeze.

"Here, *Madame,*" de Grandin bowed gallantly, French fashion, from the hips, as he extended the seal to Mrs. Penneman. "Do you place this upon your husband's finger and bid him be more careful in future. He will wake anon, and have no memory of the thralldom in which he has been held. Blame him not. He signed himself into slavery to a thing which was old—and very wicked—when time was still a youth."

Mrs. Penneman bent above her husband and slipped the golden circlet on the little finger of his left hand, then leaned forward and kissed him on the mouth. "My boy, my poor, sweet boy," she murmured, as gently as a mother might croon above her babe.

"Isn't he wonderful?" she asked de Grandin.

"Undoubtlessly, *Madame,*" the Frenchman agreed with a quick bow. "Did he not have the rare judgment to pick you for a helpmeet? But me, I think I am a little wonderful, too." He twisted first one, then the other end of his mustache till the waxed points stood out from his lips like the whiskers of a belligerent tom-cat.

"Of course you are—you're a darling!" she agreed enthusiastically, and before he was aware of her inten-

tion, she put her hands upon his shoulders and kissed him soundly first on one cheek, then the other, finally upon the lips.

"*Pardieu,* Friend Trowbridge, I think it is high time we did leave these reunited lovers together!" he exclaimed, his little eyes dancing like sunlight reflected on running water. "Come, my friend, let us go. *Allez-vous-en*!

"*Bonne nuit, Madame!*"

"For the love of heaven, de Grandin," I demanded as we drove home, "what have I been seeing, or have I dreamed it all? Was that really Madame Naîra in the Penneman's' bedroom, and if it were——?"

"Ha!" he gave a short, delighted laugh. "Did I not tell you you should see what you should see, and that it would be worth seeing?"

"Never mind the showmanship," I cut in. "Just explain all this crazy business—if you can."

"*Eh bein,* that can also be arranged," he replied. "Listen, my friend. The average man will tell you there are no such things as witches, and he will, perhaps, be right in the main, but he will also be wrong. From the very birth of time there have been forces—evil forces, *parbleu!*—which the generality of men wisely forbore to understand or to know, but which a few sought out and allied themselves with for their own wicked advantage.

"These gods of ancient times, now — what were they but such forces? Nothing. Zeus, Apollo, Osiris, Ptah, Isis, Bast—such things are but names; they describe certain vaguely understood, but nonetheless potent forces. *Pardieu,* there is no God but God, my friend; the rest are—who knows what?

"Now, when your countrymen hanged each other in Salem town in the winter of 1692, they undoubtlessly killed many innocent persons, but their basic idea was right. There were then, there have always been, and there still are certain servants of that evil entity, or combination of entities, which we call Satan.

"This Madame Naîra, she was one. *Cordieu,* she was a very great one, indeed.

"In some way, I know not how, she had become adept in using certain principles of evil for her ends, and set up in business as a fortune-teller in the world's richest city. Before our time there were thousands such in Thebes, Babylon, Ilium and Rome. Always these evil ones follow the course of the river of gold."

"And you mean to tell me Penneman actually married her when he put his ring on that statue's hand?" I asked, incredulously.

"*Mais non,* he did not wed her, for true marriage is a spiritual linking of the souls, my friend, but he did put himself in her power, for when he had gone she took the ring he left and kept it, and having such an intimately personal possession of his, she also acquired a powerful hold on its owner.

"The first clue I had to the true state of affairs was when Madame Penneman related the incident of the strange woman's appearance in her chamber. Already she had told of the incident of the missing ring, and when she declared her husband exclaimed 'Second, Second!' in his sleep as the sorceress bent above him, at once I knew that what he said was not 'Second,' but 'Sechet,' which is another name for Bast, the cat-headed goddess.

" 'Very good,' I tell me, 'we have here a votary of that cruel half woman, half cat, which reigned in olden times along the banks of the Nile. We shall see how we can defeat her.'

"I then undertook to ascertain what the young Penneman did while he neglected his wife. *Parbleu,* his

time and money were lavished like water on that veiled woman for whose smile he forsook her he had sworn to love and cherish!"

"Then there really was a liaison between him and Madame Naîra?" I asked.

"Yes—yes, and no," he replied ambiguously. "For the touch of her lower lip he would have walked barefoot over miles of broken glass, yet he knew not what he did while doing it. His state was something akin to that of one under hypnosis—conscious of his acts and deeds while doing them, entirely unaware of them afterward. A sort of externally induced amnesia, it was.

"These things puzzled me much, but still I was unwilling to concede the woman possessed more than ordinary powers. 'We shall see this Veiled Prophetess,' I tell me. 'Friend Trowbridge and I shall interview her under assumed names, and prove to ourselves that she is but a charlatan.'

"*Eh bien,* we did see much. We did see the loss of our hats and overcoats!"

"But if Madame Naîra knew at once who you were and that you were fighting her, how was it she could not avoid the trap—and, by the way, what was that trap?" I demanded.

"I can not say," he responded. "Perhaps there are limitations on her powers of divination. It may well be that she could read my thoughts even to my name, when we were face to face, yet could not project herself through space to observe what I planned while away from her. Were not those other witches of olden times unable to say when the officers of the law were descending on them, and so were taken to perish at the stake?

"As for the trap we set, my friend, it was simple. That was not the Veiled Prophetess herself you did behold in Madame Penneman's room, but her simulacrum—her projection. It is possible for those people, by taking thought, to project their likenesses at great distances, but always they must be where there is sympathetic atmosphere. This the witch woman already had, because she had bound Benjamin Penneman in her spell. At will she could assume the likeness of herself in his room, or anywhere he happened to be, while her living body lay, as though locked in sleep, miles away. That explains how it is she vanished so mysteriously after warning Madame Penneman on her previous visits.

"But, *grâce à Dieu,* for all ill there is a remedy, if we can but find it. I bethought me. 'Is it not likely,' I ask me, 'that the things which charm away those other evil people, the werewolves and the vampires, will also prevent the free movement of the projection of a witch?'

"'*Morbleu,* but it is most probable,' I reply to me, and so I set about my work.

"First I did give to Madame Penneman a harmless drug—a hypnotic—to mix with the food and drink of her husband. That will induce a seemingly natural sleep, and hold him fast away from the wicked Madame Naîra. Very good. The first night the plan did work well, the second and third, also.

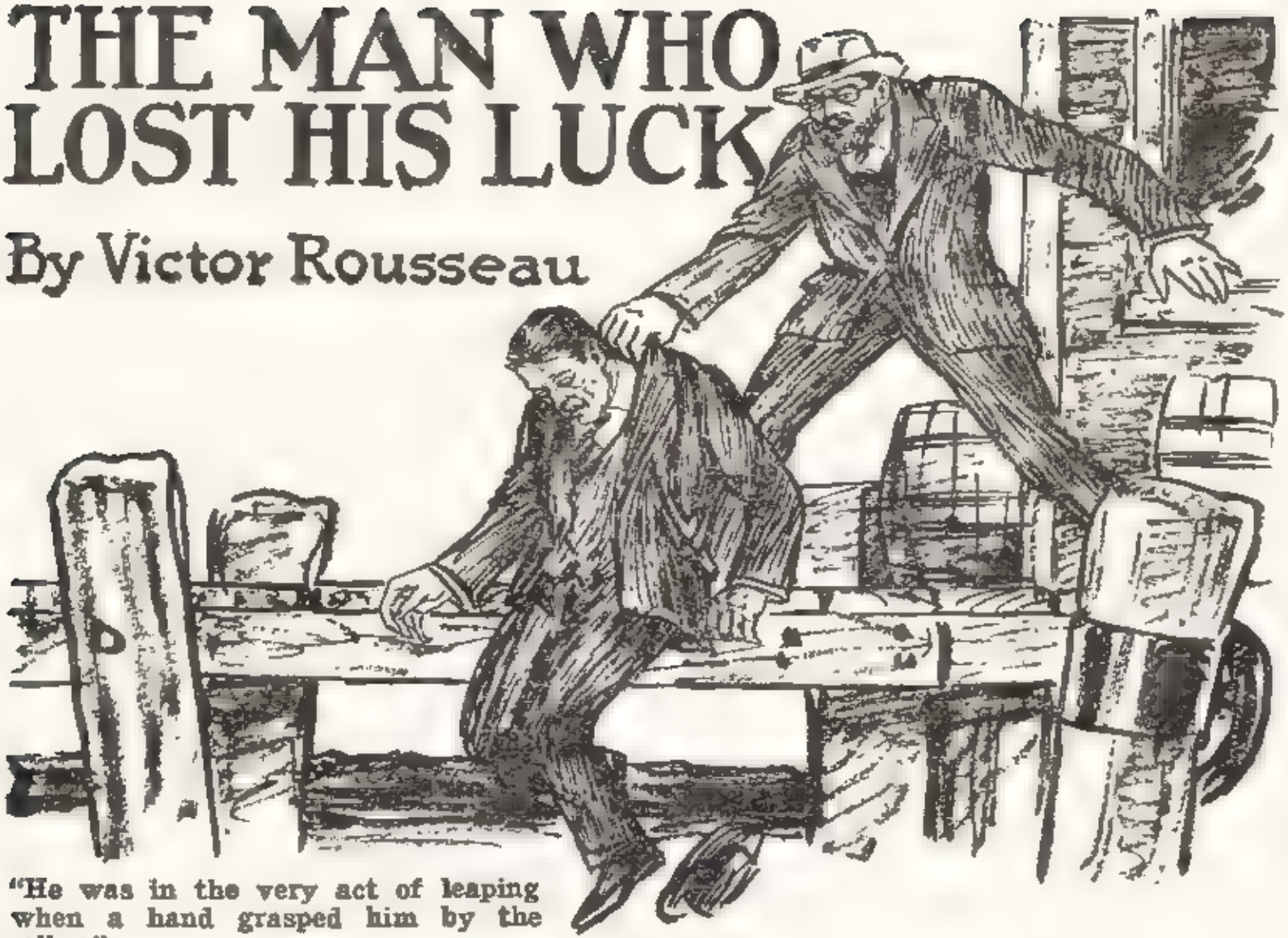
"Heretofore this woman have come in her spiritual likeness to charm her lover back when he have returned to his wife. I make sure she will do so again, and I have prepared a barrier which I think she can not pass. It is made of the wicks of blessed candles and on it are strung many leaves and twigs of holly—holly, the Christmas bloom, the touch of which is intolerable to evil spirits and over which they can not pass.

"When the projection of Madame Naîra comes to Penneman's house tonight, Madame Penneman does surround it suddenly with the ring of

(Continued on page 720)

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS LUCK

By Victor Rousseau



"He was in the very act of leaping when a hand grasped him by the collar."

I MUST confess that I have not told the truth concerning the beginning of my relations with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, in whose company I witnessed so many marvels of psychical experiment. I have said that I became his secretary through our association at the hospital, where I was one of his lecture class. That is true; nevertheless, I have omitted—through shame, I must confess—the story of the experiences that brought about our intimacy.

I was desperate with ill fortune. Everything had gone against me. I had graduated from the hospital the year before, rashly married upon the strength of an expected position which never materialized, attempted to practise without obtaining a single patient a week, and finally found ruin at my side. What little fortune I had left was lost when the great panic of '93 swept over the country. Is it a wonder that I resolved to seek that oblivion which I foolishly believed would be attained by suicide?

It was a dark November evening and I was standing upon the extremity of the deserted wharf, ill-clad, hungry, and homeless. I remember how I looked at the black, oily water flowing swiftly beneath me, gathering resolution to jump. At last I attained it; I stepped back a few paces, and was in the very act of leaping when a hand grasped me by the collar and forcibly arrested me in mid-air. It was then that, looking back at my rescuer, I discovered that it was the doctor who had saved me.

NOTE.—This is the ninth in a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

"My luck!" I groaned. "It follows me, even here!"

Then, my nerve gone, I broke into unrestrainable sobs, while the doctor waited patiently at my side. He knew me; I had not thought he remembered any of us, for he had seemed very self-absorbed when he lectured to the classes.

"I heard of you only today," he said, "and that you had had ill fortune. They told me at your tenement that you strolled upon the dock at nights; some fortunate instinct brought me here in the critical moment. Come home and be my guest for tonight; I have no doubt that I can make you see your prospects in a very different manner by tomorrow." And, by the exercise of his strange power of compulsion, he forced me to comply.

A change of clothing and a steaming hot supper did, I admit, work wonders. I had not realized before how much my physical weakness, induced by privations, had contributed to my despondency. Late in the evening, when I was sitting in his study enjoying a cigar, he drew me out.

"And so that is my story," I summed up in conclusion. "Six months ago I was a man of some little means, married, and looking forward to a successful career. Today I am a penniless outcast, homeless and desperate. All I had in the world has been swept away, my wife has left me, perforce, to go to her parents, my self-respect has utterly gone, and but for your intervention I should now be lying at the bottom of the canal. But my ill luck would not even leave me a quiet exit from life."

"Hm!" commented Brodsky. "You claim that what is vulgarly called a 'streak' of ill luck has struck you?"

"Everything has gone against me," I answered. "The most amazing combinations seem to be pursuing me. It is almost as if some mocking power were persecuting me. For instance, two weeks ago today I was forced to vacate my medical offices in Pitt Street. I had not had a patient during three weeks, and never more than the poorest clientele. One hour after I had gone, so I learned afterward, I was summoned to the house of Mr. Van Wybergh, the millionaire, to attend a member of his family who was dangerously ill. The case would have meant five hundred dollars to me. And today I lost my last five-dollar gold piece out of a hole in my pocket."

"Well, well, let's see," said Brodsky. "If I remember, you fellows at the hospital used to be famous poker players. Let's play a few rounds." He took a pack of cards from a table drawer and dealt the hands. I had the king, queen, nine and eight of hearts and the eight of spades. I threw away the spade and drew. Brodsky drew three.

I had finished in hearts—king, queen, ten, nine and eight. I laid them upon the table. Then I looked again and gasped. What I had thought to be the king was the knave. I had a straight flush.

"That's no symptom of ill luck," said the doctor, smiling. "Suppose you deal a hand."

This time I dealt myself two pairs. I threw the odd card away. Of course a full hand rewarded me. Brodsky had a single pair of threes.

"Well, that's the way," I said bitterly. "It's like the Van Wybergh matter. If we had had money on the game I shouldn't have drawn anything."

"That's true," said Brodsky, "but if you will recollect, you thought your straight flush was a simple flush; you mistook the knave for the king. In other words, you are not in a condition to seize your chance when it comes to you."

"What have I done to deserve this 'streak'?" I cried.

"My dear fellow," said the doctor, "there is no such thing as good luck or bad. Everything that happens, from the fall of a kingdom to the stubbing of one's toe, is the product of innumerable circumstances. Every event is the result of some action committed either in this or in some previous life; and so the world goes on, intricately interconnected, until the puzzle picture shall have been put together and the Karmic law fulfilled.

"The soul is the guardian in each of us that determines our destiny. In some, it is phenomenally alert to pick its path clear through the difficulties that beset its charge. In others it loses for the time this discriminating faculty—and then bad luck follows. Had your soul been alert, it would have warned you, by instinct, for example, not to invest in the stock market offices until Van Wybergh's messenger came. It would have told you to put the gold piece in some other pocket.

"But take courage. Every misfortune means that so much the less ill luck remains for you. Your luck will turn."

"It's too late," I answered moodily. "I would rather go through life suffering the normal calamities than have them heaped upon me like this. Isn't there any way to change this 'streak'?"

"Yes, there is a way," said Brodsky. "You can deceive your soul for awhile, for the soul is amenable to suggestion. For instance, good luck attends the flinging of an old shoe after a bridal pair. Why? Simply because this act, which is one that originally symbolized the infliction of intense humiliation, suggests misfortune to this watchful guardian, and automatically it endeavors to counteract it. So, too, in the legend of Job, and in the Grecian myth of Polycrates and the ring, good luck brings about a reversal automatically. Humiliation and abjection gave back to Job more success than he had ever had before. Incidentally, have you not seen the gambler rise up from the card table and turn his chair round—an act which hypnotizes the soul into the belief that it must bring about some change in circumstances? But, though man can change his fortune, he can not permanently affect it. He can draw upon the bank of success, but he has to pay back all that he has taken."

"I don't care what happens afterward," I cried desperately. "Give me two years of happiness and worldly success; give me back my wife, my home, my money; then let fate do her worst to me. Can you do that?" I cried tauntingly.

"Yes, I can," replied the doctor. "But first think well what you are asking. Is your mind resolute?"

"It is."

The doctor was looking at me oddly. His eyes seemed to burn through me, and I felt incapable of averting mine. "Strike that match you are holding," he said.

I had taken a match to relight my cigar; obediently I lit it and watched the flame creep down the wood.

"Come with me," said the doctor, rising. "You shall have what you have asked for."

I followed him along a narrow passage into his laboratory—a long, low, sound-proof room around which stood many electrical engines of an unknown character. He bade me step upon an insulated platform of what looked like glass, and applied a couple of electrodes to my neck and breast.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "The experience will be a curious one, but neither painful nor troublesome. Before I fulfil your desire, however,

I will explain to you the mechanism of this machine.

"I spoke to you of the gambler turning round his chair. By means of this machine, however, I am enabled to turn the subject about, as in a mirror. It is purely a fourth-dimensional process, whereby the right and left sides become transposed; the right hand becomes the left hand, the heart beats on the right side of the body, the buttons of the coat appear on the right no longer, but on the left. Aside from these trifling inconveniences, nothing unusual will be noticed. It is a process unimaginable in the three-dimensional world, but in the four-dimensional as easily done as the turning of a coat inside out.

"This change affects the soul much as a pool is affected when stirred up with a stick. The elements of fortune are stirred up and set in motion, the heavier sink and the lighter, those that produce good fortune, remain on top. In this way you will achieve what you demand—at the price of draining the lees afterward." He pulled out a stout bar of some woodlike material, which I grasped firmly between my right finger and thumb.

"Do not on any account let go of this until I give the signal," said the doctor. He stepped down from my side and touched a lever. There was a crackle, succeeded by a humming sound, and a continuous line of pale blue sparks was whirled along the thin wires that connected the machine with the electrodes, so that it seemed to become blue-hot. Brodsky hovered over the instrument with outstretched hands, constantly adjusting it, as though to incubate the vital forces which were at play.

"It is purely a matter of physics," he continued. "The soul, which is composed of the same atoms as the earthly body, of which it is a counterpart, but inconceivably more tenuous, becomes plastic at a little more than seven million vibrations a second." He indicated a little dial that I had not noticed before, on which the hundred thousands were marked as units, and the millions indicated as tens. The hand was hovering over the four.

"You are now experiencing a voltage, one thousandth part of which would instantly prove fatal," remarked the doctor. The hand crept up to the five, and, with a final spurt, the buzzing and blue light ceased.

"Do you suppose that the machine is really silent and cold, because you can neither see it nor hear it move?" asked Brodsky.

"Of course not," I replied. "Science tells us that the vibrations are too high for sense perception."

"Just so," the doctor answered. "Comparatively low vibrations strike upon our ears as sound; at a higher speed the sound ceases and we see them as red light. Still higher, and the light becomes in succession yellow, green, indigo, and violet blue. Quicken the vibrations beyond the ultra-violet rays, and we get the X-rays, electricity, radio-activity, all different aspects of the same phenomenon of motion. At last there comes a speed at which we can no longer register these phenomena through the medium of even the most delicate instrument. But when we reach the seven million point we stir the world of the soul; the invisible becomes once more visible."

He ceased. I felt a strange little thrill, as though someone had poured cold water down my back.

"Step down," said the doctor, reversing the lever.

I obeyed him and stood still in the middle of the laboratory. Was that all? Something had happened to me. I looked down at my feet, my legs, my waistcoat. The buttons had shifted to the opposite side, as Brodsky had foretold. I placed my hand

to the right side of my chest. My heart was pulsing normally, but undeniably on the wrong side.

"Yes," said the doctor, smiling, "if ever you are starving again, you can obtain employment as a medical freak in a museum, or at some hospital. Ah! Don't let go of that bar. Yes, it is in your left hand now."

I was left-handed, too. For a moment a sickening terror rushed over me. I pushed my left hand against the wall to steady myself. Then I put it to my breast pocket to find my handkerchief. It was not there —it must be on the other side, of course. I found it and placed it to my forehead. Something dropped from it and fell tinkling upon the ground. I stooped and picked it up; it was the five-dollar piece I had lost.

"And now," said the doctor, "in order that your good fortune, which, you see, is already beginning, may fulfil itself in the most adequate manner, you had best go back to the pier on which I found you earlier in the evening, and take up the thread of your adventures there. Make the most of your success, for it will be short-lived."

I HAVE some recollection of stumbling through the streets again, of descending the long wharf, still empty and deserted, under a sky brightening as the sun mounted toward the horizon. Then a temporary unconsciousness overcame me, for when I opened my eyes it was early daylight and the dock laborers were trooping to their work, marching stolidly past me without speaking. I looked around. I was lying three feet from the water's edge, and the chill wind cut me like a knife. "Only a drunken laborer sleeping off his debauch," they must have thought. But I had not tasted liquor for days. Was it a dream, then? My hand still clutched the gold piece. With this, at least, I could obtain food and shelter for a while. I made my way to the wretched tenement in which I had found shelter for the few days before, determined to purchase a week's respite from the cold at least. I pushed open the rickety hall door and ascended to my miserable room. Inside I heard somebody sobbing. I turned the handle slowly, not daring to believe the thought that came to me. My wife was seated on the one chair that stood at the foot of the stretcher bed. She turned her head and saw me and, with a great cry of gladness, ran to me and flung her arms around me.

"I have come back," she sobbed. "I could not remain away from you and leave you to struggle alone. We will face poverty together, you and I. I will never leave you again—never. Why," she went on looking at me strangely, "you have new clothes."

Then for the first time I noticed that I was still wearing the suit that Brodsky had loaned me. My heart leaped in my breast. With the rags gone, my self-respect had returned; now I felt able once again to face the world. I would go out and look for work immediately; be it of any sort, I would undertake it. Nothing should keep me down.

I bought a morning newspaper in order to look through the advertisements. A large, black headline on the outside page arrested my attention, however. There had been a sharp rise in stocks; two rival financiers were fighting for the control of the Seaboard Eagle line and shares had doubled overnight. I flung the paper from me with a groan. I had held a hundred shares of this stock until their steady rise induced me to sell out and purchase a thousand on margin, in the hope of reaping a rich pecuniary harvest. Then the crash came, and they had sunk with amazing swiftness. Only three days before I had telephoned my broker to

sell out and send the wretched remnant to my wife, that she might have a little to live upon for a few weeks at least. And if I had not sent it I should have made a fortune.

The broker was an old acquaintance; he had been the cause of my ruin; perhaps he would give me work—any work, at ten dollars a week, something that would at least provide us with the bare necessities of life. Resolved to plead my cause desperately, I hurried to his office, where I found him just taking off his coat. He hastened forward with hands outstretched.

"Congratulations, my dear fellow," he cried heartily. "You have made thirty-seven thousand odd on this deal. I have been expecting your instructions to sell. The boom won't last—perhaps not over tonight. Shall I sell for you at once? Be satisfied with what you've made!"

He had never received my telephone message! His clerk must have received it and, in some incomprehensible lapse of memory, forgotten it. The next day Seaboard Eagle stocks fell back to what they had previously been, but not before I had sold out for nearly forty thousand dollars.

On the next day I went back to my offices in Pitt Street and re-engaged them, paying a year's rent in advance. Though I had been compelled to dispose of all my instruments and library, by some fortunate chance they still remained there; the dealer had sold them to the landlord, who had contemplated transferring them to his son, a young student. In a few minutes I had again become their possessor.

"Patients will not matter to me now," I mused aloud. "I shall have leisure to devote myself to medical investigation——"

A knock at the door recalled me to myself. I opened it; there upon the threshold stood Van Wybergh himself. He sprang forward and grasped my hands.

"Thank God I have found you, Doctor!" he exclaimed. "I have heard of the reputation you made for yourself at the hospital; you performed the identical operation successfully, they tell me, and I would not trust any surgeon but you. Come quickly."

Within two years I had gained a reputation second to no surgeon in the East. I attended the President; my fame spread to Europe, and I received the largest fee upon record for curing the infant Prince of Portugal of some childish complaint, being escorted to Lisbon upon the royal yacht with naval honors. My home life was ideally happy. Two children were born to us. With money, fame, and, best of all, work, nothing was lacking to make my fortune complete. I had forgotten the misty dream of that night upon the wharf; if I recalled it, I dismissed it as the fantasy of a starving man. And yet, somehow, somewhere, I felt the existence of some troublous thing that I put from my mind, some dark secret which hardly entered my field of consciousness.

For several weeks I had been feeling curiously indisposed. They say that the physician who diagnoses his own ailments has a fool for a patient. I went to Sargent of Buffalo. He sounded me; then he took me by the coat lapels and I saw the joy of the doctor over some rare complaint burn in his eyes, for all his solemnity.

"My dear doctor," he said, "your working days are over. Has your heart never troubled you before?"

"My heart!" I exclaimed.

"You have a congenital malposition of the heart," he answered.

(Continued on page 717)

Stark Terror Came to Felix the Leech in That Mad Ride in the Storm

The Crooked Smile

By BRYAN IRVINE

OF COURSE, a man whose smile is all one-sided has no more right to return to Earth after death to pester people than has the man whose smile is straight. But—well——

Eight hours after his release from the penitentiary, Felix McGroin—better known in crookdom as Felix the Leech—flitted from tree to tree along Foothill Drive. Darkness was coming on. In Felix's pocket was a revolver; in his heart was murder. The prison from which he had recently been released was several hundred miles behind him; the home of his intended victim—one Crooked Smile Harry—was less than a mile ahead.

There were a number of reasons why Felix had definitely decided that death should forever erase the crooked smile from the face of Crooked Smile Harry. My, how Felix hated that smile and the wearer thereof! That crooked smile had been a large factor in the causes that led to Felix's four years in prison. It was that crooked smile that brought about the estrangement of Felix the Leech and Della Delmere, the latter being a beautiful and accomplished lady crook. Incidentally, Della had married Crooked Smile Harry shortly after Felix landed in the big penitentiary for a ten-year stretch. Six years of this sentence had been deducted because Felix had turned out to be a very proficient stool-pigeon for the prison's "screws".

As Felix hurried along in the gathering darkness, his warped mind, as it had done many times during his stay in prison, reviewed again the years preceding his donning of the prison gray. And always the crooked smile of his one-time pal stood out prominently in these thoughts of the past.

It had been that smile that lured Felix the Leech from his lone-wolf activities into a partnership with Crooked Smile Harry. That cursed smile seemed to draw people to Harry as a magnet draws needles. Funny thing about that smile. Nothing pretty about it. It was all one-sided, the left side of Harry's face remaining passive, expressionless, while the right side broke into a smile that seemed to hypnotize people. Well, it had been the undoing of Felix the Leech.

Felix and Della Delmere were engaged to marry and all was going well until along came Harry and his crooked smile. Della fell hard for it. It had been a simple matter for Harry, very influential in the city, to double-cross Felix and have him "railroaded" to prison.

So Felix had served his time, carefully made plans for the violent death of Crooked Smile Harry and, now since he was free and Harry was not aware of that fact, the score could be settled—so thought Felix. Felix had not once considered the probability of the failure of death alone

to take the crooked smile away forever.

The night wind brought a cold, drizzling rain. Felix turned up the collar of his cheap "discharge" coat and hurried on. Some crook friends had told him just where the quiet country home of the now wealthy and retired Crooked Smile Harry could be found. "A half-mile beyond the high concrete bridge over the river," they had said. "First house on the table-land beyond the bridge. No other houses within two miles of the place."

Felix came to the bridge. The swirling river far below broke with a sullen roar against the huge boulders that lay in its bed. Felix, after one hasty look into the black depths, drew back to the center of the bridge and hurried on. He shuddered. He had always hated water.

On the concrete approach to the bridge was a sharp curve around a small hill. From there the paved road led steadily upward to the table-land on which Crooked Smile Harry had built his home. Fifteen minutes of steady climbing brought the Leech to within sight of the house, a snug, modern bungalow sitting back in a grove of gnarled old oaks. Between the swaying branches of the trees Felix could see the lights shining through the windows.

SEVERAL hundred yards from the house the ex-convict left the road and, furtively circling a small rise in the grounds, entered the grove of oaks. At last he crouched behind the trunk of a large oak not more than twenty feet from the front door of the bungalow. On the driveway near the front door stood a new, bright yellow sedan of expensive make. Felix cursed softly as his eyes took in the lines of the beautiful car. Harry's car, no doubt—the car in which Crooked Smile Harry and the woman who was to have married Felix the Leech rode about for pleasure. Felix's hand stole back to his hip pocket and brought forth the revolver. "Very soon, Harry," he snarled, "you'll ride in a hearse."

Voices from within the house reached his ears, the voices of a man and a woman. Now the woman laughed. Felix instantly recognized that laugh—Della! The front door suddenly opened. Harry and his wife emerged from the house, laughing and talking. They paused on the small porch while Harry drew on a pair of gloves and buttoned his raincoat.

Felix, hidden behind the branches of the tree, raised the gun and trained it on the man's breast. His finger tightened on the trigger. One second more and the score would be settled—but in that second Della, all unconscious of the menacing gun, stepped between her husband and Felix. The finger on the trigger relaxed. Then it tightened on the trigger again. Why not kill both of them? They were both traitors, cheats. The thought hurt. But he could not pull the trigger. Four years of carefully nourished hate had not killed his love for the woman. No, he could not harm Della. He would wait until she stepped out of the line of fire.

"And don't forget, Harry," the woman was saying, "you promised to be back home not later than 9:30."

"And I never break a promise, Della," Harry replied.

Felix could see the crooked smile on the man's face.

"I sometimes worry, Harry," Della complained. "You have enemies, you know."

"Plenty of 'em," Harry laughed. "But the only real dangerous enemy —Felix the Leech—is still in stir and will perhaps be in stir several years yet. When his term expires—well, he'll simply disappear some dark night. I'll see to that; so don't wor-

ry," patting her shoulder reassuringly. "Why, Della"—and his face was very grave as he looked her in the eye—"even death could not keep me away from you. I'll always come back to you, smiling and happy. I actually believe that if I should die before 9:30 tonight, I would be back here with you at that time."

"Oh, Harry," Della sighed, "I believe you. You are such a comfort!"

Felix smiled grimly. "We'll see about that, Harry dear," he thought. "Even death can not keep you away from Della, eh? We'll know very soon whether or not it can." Yet a cold shiver ran down Felix's spine. Never had Harry failed to do exactly as he said he would do. The ex-convict strove impatiently to banish the strange fear from his heart.

Della accompanied Harry to the car, unconsciously remaining between her husband and Felix. Even after Harry had settled himself at the wheel, Felix could not fire without the danger of the bullet striking Della.

The door of the sedan was closed, Another wave of his hand to Della, another crooked smile and the bright yellow sedan shot away in the darkness toward the highway.

Felix was undecided what to do. For ten minutes after replacing the gun in his pocket he pondered. Then came a plan. He would return to the bridge and, at the sharp turn on the approach, wait for the return of the sedan. The pavement, because of the rain, would be slippery and treacherous. He of the crooked smile would not attempt to make that turn at a speed in excess of ten miles an hour. It would be a simple matter to dart from the brush at the side of the road, spring onto the running board and shoot the man.

FIFTEEN minutes later Felix stood, wet to the skin, cold and shivering, in a clump of bushes near the end of the bridge. All would have been well had he been able to forget Harry's words to Della that "even death could not keep me away from you."

How the time dragged! To Felix it seemed that he had waited an eternity. And the rain: it had turned from a slow drizzle to a steady downpour. And the wind: it moaned, sobbed through the treetops. The piercing cry of a wandering coyote brought a gasp to the throat of Felix and a chill to his heart. From a treetop near the river came the monotonous, lonesome "who? who? who?" of an owl, asking, always asking—patiently curious, tireless, persistent. Then a deafening peal of thunder shook the heavens and a long, jagged, fiery claw of lightning momentarily lighted up the sodden land. The rain increased. More thunder, like intermittent detonations of a thousand cannon. More lightning, like white, blinding leers of countless lost souls.

Felix cursed frequently to bolster up his courage. Why did Harry's words keep running on through his mind—"Even death could not keep me away from you, Della." Felix consulted his watch by the light from the splitting heavens. Nine twenty-five! Even as he replaced the watch in his pocket, the glare of oncoming headlights brought his eyes to the bridge. The bright yellow sedan! On it came, glistening and dripping in the lightning's blinding glare.

Concealed in the brush, Felix could plainly see the crooked smile on the face of the man at the wheel. Now the car was on the approach. Very slowly it came toward Felix through the water racing down the approach. Felix the Leech's hour of vengeance had come. No need of bounding onto the running board; Harry was less than six feet away. The ex-convict took careful aim and fired.

The report of the revolver was

swallowed in a mighty peal of thunder. For one brief instant the crooked smile vanished from the face of the man at the wheel, then it returned even as the mortally wounded Crooked Smile Harry placed a hand over his heart. The car came to a stop. Harry slumped forward, his head resting on the steering wheel, arms dropping lifeless at his sides. The sedan began to slide slowly backward. The murderer bounded onto the running board and flung the door open. Four more bullets went into the lifeless and bleeding thing at the wheel.

Quickly the ex-convict threw on the emergency brakes and switched off the lights. A moment later he staggered under the weight of the limp body on his shoulder. Half-way across the bridge he carried it. Then, after resting it a moment on the rail to catch his breath, he pushed it over. It went hurtling down toward the boulder-strewn torrent below; but before the seething waters covered it up, the murderer, looking down, saw the face of his one-time pal. White it was—white with the livid whiteness of death—and on it, very clearly seen in the glare of lightning, was the crooked smile.

Felix stumbled back to the sedan. Terror gripped him. The intense hatred so carefully nourished for four years, spent in a few short minutes, had left him weak and remorseful.

Gasping and struggling with the steering wheel, he finally succeeded in turning the car around and headed it across the bridge. The powerful motor roared and the heavy car lurched away in the darkness. Three miles from the bridge, the fleeing man knew, was the road that led over the mountains and into Mexico.

Felix was a careful driver, having driven the warden's car while a trusty at the prison. But now, as he peered intently at the road ahead, a slight movement in the rear seat of the car, reflected in the small mirror above the steering wheel, caught his eye. It was nothing more than a vague, white flash. Again that flash of white. The murderer dared not look back. Fear, horrible and menacing, clutched at his heart. Then came a broad sheet of white lightning and——

The Leech's eyes sought the small mirror and remained fixed there and a scream of mortal terror rent the night air; for it was Harry back there in the rear seat—and on his face was the crooked smile! The little mirror did not lie. A deafening clap of thunder, the roar of the car's exhaust and another broad, white path of lightning. Another scream from Felix the Leech. Then a crash, the splintering of wood, rending of steel and sheet metal, the shattering of glass.

Next morning while the men of the wrecking crew were removing the mangled remains of Felix the Leech from the demolished car at the bottom of the deep ditch by the side of the road, they found, lashed firmly to the rear seat, in an upright position and unharmed, a life-size bust portrait of Crooked Smile Harry in a heavy black frame. Pinned to the frame at the top was a card on which was written, "To my wife, Della, from Harry, on our fifth anniversary." The portrait had been covered with oilcloth, black on the outside and white on the inside. The wind had blown part of the white side out during Felix's wild drive.

"Saturn with its rings was stupendously beautiful from our proximity."

The Story So Far

THROUGH an instrument called the myrdoscope, Brett Gryce sees a girl in a distant world, menaced by a giant. Her world is so vast that a second of Time there takes whole years of earthly measure. During three years he catches glimpses of the girl and her peril, the giant about to bring down a huge tree on her head, and the girl awakening to a sense of terror, but all this has taken but a second of Time in that vaster world. Brett and Martt Gryce set out to rescue the girl, in a space-ship invented by their father, Dr. Gryce, which can change its position in Time and Space.

CHAPTER 4

THE WATCHERS

WE SPENT the rest of that night in the little observation room on the upper story of Dr. Gryce's home; with him and Frannie beside me I sat watching the vehicle's flight through the electro-telescope. It was not a high-powered instrument, but it served. I could see the vehicle plainly as it passed through our atmosphere and out into Space. A tiny blob with darker rectangles of windows.

Dr. Gryce sat with instruments, charts and his computations before him. Occasionally he would ask me for the vehicle's position; and I would give him the points and clock the time with all the accuracy of which I was capable. He seemed solemn, perturbed no longer; the scientist in him was all-absorbing. He said once with satisfaction, "Brett is competent—the boy hasn't varied a hair from my directions."

I knew that he and Brett had picked up the image of the girl and her assailants within a month past; and that Brett had accurate calculations which he could follow until able to capture the image on his own instruments.

"How long will it take them to get there?" I asked. "When will they be back? You said within a few days. How long?" Dr. Gryce looked up from his work with a faint smile. "There's no answer to that, Frank. Without a change of their time it might take them to reach that realm out there a thousand years or a million years—the vehicle's maximum velocity we do not know—that they are to find out."

"A million years! And another million to come back!"

His smile broadened. "As we measure Time, yes. But they will change their Time-rate; the trip may seem to them only a few days."

"But," I persisted, "two million years of our Time! And we can not change our Time."

"No, Frank. But you speak thoughtlessly. Brett can return to any point in our Time he wishes. Not with exactitude—but, we hope, within a few days. They will return here—within that Time we have agreed."

Frannie's face was very solemn though she said nothing; and I knew then that she was wondering if her brothers would be able to keep their promise.

Dr. Gryce rose from his chair. "I must adjust the aural ray—Brett may need it."

He had already explained this ray. A device similar to the familiar aurometer by which the aural power of the earth is measured. He had perfected an instrument for projecting into Space the invisible aura of the earth—projecting it in a tiny, very intense beam. An instrument for visualizing its characteristic bands was in the vehicle. They hoped that the ray might reach out into distant, interstellar Space; a flash of it crossing the sky as our earth rotated. And, coming back, Brett would see it, recognize it. A guide, as he came back from beyond all the universes strewn there throughout the magnitude of Space. If it could reach out there—if he saw it. My heart sank at the thoughts, doubts, which rushed upon me.

Dr. Gryce set his aural projector, with its ray, invisible to the naked eye, flashing after the vehicle. Silently he returned to his seat.

"Can you see them? You can still see them, Frank?" Frannie turned to me with anxious face.

I could still see the vehicle. But faintly, for faster than any mail flyer it was winging its way outward. Mars—approaching its closest point to the earth now to bring a deluge of the Martian Mails—red Mars at midnight had been above us. The vehicle had gone that way; and now, visually beside the planet, they were sinking together in the western sky. The stars were paling with the coming dawn. The east flushed with it, and presently I could see the vehicle no longer.

And as I turned from my instrument, I heard Dr. Gryce. "Why Frannie, girl! You're worn out! Come, it's dawn—they've vanished."

Little Frannie had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER 5

THE RETURN

We did not sight the vehicle the next night; it had seemingly passed beyond range of my instrument. With the myrdoscope we hoped to catch it, but could not. The night following was overcast with clouds. But we remained awake; Dr. Gryce seemed to feel that his sons might be returning. It was pathetic to me, observing him quietly slipping away from us at intervals to wander among the wreckage of his garden, gazing anxiously upward.

A week and still they had not come. What Dr. Gryce said to my Director I do not know; but he told me the Director was satisfied to have me remain away until my present business was finished. I had determined as much for myself. Not all the Directors in the Service could have taken me away from here, with Brett and Martt unheard from.

Like a beacon day and night we made sure that our aural ray was flashing its beam. But would Brett see it?

Another week. Still no sign. Doubts, fears, terrors assailed us.

Were we watching, waiting futilely for what would never come? The thought was in my mind—and I knew it was in the minds of Dr. Gryce and Frannie—but never once did we voice it. Had Brett and Martt, perhaps, returned to our Past? With mechanism impaired, had they landed here in what we now called the Past—landed to find a wilderness of roaming savages? Or to find this little Space we now called a house and garden, a barren icy waste with men no more than beasts upon it? Or landed here in our Future? Ourselves dead, gone and forgotten? A great city here on this spot, perchance, with strange people and strange ways and nothing remaining of the loved ones they sought? Or were they lost and wandering in Space? Out there among myriad starry Universes hopeless to find our infinitesimal Solar System? Or lost perhaps in Time, wandering through the eons searching for the little centuries, years, days that identified their goal?

Or, again, perhaps they had safely reached that outer realm? Perhaps, once there, something had happened to prevent their return? In what we now called the Present, perhaps they were out there, transfixed, just as to our vision that strange girl and her strange assailants were transfixed—stricken of motion, with a passing of Time to us insensible. Transfixed out there now, to take no more than a few breaths, to move a hand, no more, during all the span of our own tiny lives?

II

I was sitting early one evening near the monight hour, alone with Frannie in the observation room. Dr. Gryce, in the room adjoining, had fallen asleep, worn by repressed anxiety and his now almost day and night vigil. We were talking in half-whispers; and abruptly Frannie voiced the fear that possessed us all.

"Oh, Frank, can't you see them? Please, you must! Oh, I'm afraid they're never coming back. Never—coming back."

It sounded so horrible. "Hush, Frannie. You mustn't say things like that." I put my arm around her, and suddenly like a child she flung herself to me; sobbed, and clung to me.

"Hush, Frannie. Don't cry—please don't cry. I'll look again. I might see them now. I'll try to."

I drew away from her; went back to my instrument. I had in mind to try the myrdoscope, but all our efforts with it during the two weeks past had been unavailing. It was a calm, clear evening. A broadly crescent moon was falling into the west. Mars was well above the eastern horizon; through the electro-telescope I looked that way. My circular field was empty. Frannie was checking her sobs, interested with hope renewed.

"Don't you see them, Frank?"

"No—not yet—*Yes!* I see them! Frannie, I see them!"

From visually above the red planet, out of nothingness a huge shape suddenly materialized. It had not been there an instant before; it seemed for the space of a thought, a transparent ghost of the vehicle; solidifying until even before I had told Frannie, I was aware that I saw it there. The vehicle unmistakable.

"They've come, Frannie! I see them! Call your father. Dr. Gryce! They've come! They're safe!"

How my heart leaped to be able to say it! Frannie was calling; and Dr. Gryce, no more than half awake, repeating, "They've come? They're in sight? They're safe?"

This gentle old man, how full of thankfulness his heart must have been! He came stumbling into the room. "Where are they, Frank? You can see them, lad?"

I could see them indeed—plainly, for abruptly I realized that they were no farther than just beyond the earth's atmosphere. And I could see also the conventional vane flying at horizontal above the vehicle's tower to denote that all was well within. They had come. They were safe.

They landed in the garden. Like a wafting feather the vehicle floated down under Brett's skilled guidance. It was of a size seemingly identical with the one it had upon departure, but evidence of its trip was everywhere visible. Its gleaming milk-white color was dulled. Its sides were pitted and scarred—the metal burned. A lower corner seemed fused into a shapeless lump.

The door slid open as we crowded forward. My heart was pounding. A sudden, irrelevant thought leaped to me—a thought, hope, that they might have brought back with them that strangely beautiful girl they had gone to rescue. A thought abruptly, fiercely poignant—yet with it a consciousness of its whimsicality that I—Frank Elgon—who loved Frannie Gryce, should be possessed of such incongruous desire.

The door was open. Brett and Martt—queerly garbed to seem almost strangers—were crowding there, with no one else behind them. But already I had forgotten the girl. Frannie's glad cries of welcome rang out; and Dr. Gryce's tremulous greeting; and I heard my own voice, strangely calm, "Well! Brett—Martt—you got back safely, didn't you? I'm so glad—we're all so glad!"

CHAPTER 6

THE FLIGHT INTO TIME, SIZE AND SPACE

They seemed not tired, but undoubtedly they were hungry, famished; and before they would say a word of those strange things we knew they had to tell, they made us feed them. "Regular food," as Martt laughingly called it. "By the code! We've eaten for months weird things supposed to be edible. My digestion is ruined."

Months! They had been gone two weeks and two days into a realm where those little sixteen days were no more than a tiny fraction of a second! Yet they spoke of months! It was very strange.

"Frannie! *Don't* ask me that again." Martt affectionately tweaked her chin. "We found her, I tell you. Wait till we've had supper—you'll hear."

They ate with the relish of those long deprived of accustomed food; and as we sat with them, forbearing to ask the eager questions flooding us, again I had that impression of the strangeness which had come to them. It was not only their manner of dress, though that of itself was extraordinary. They wore shirts of a colored cloth with a high rolling collar in front, low and open in back. Short trousers that were queerly wide and flapping at the knee, stockings that seemed of a soft gray leather and long-pointed shoes of a material I could not name. Over the shirt a short jacket, wide-shouldered and with sleeves that puffed and flared; and a skirt to it at the waist which rolled upward. Their hats—which Frannie rescued from the vehicle—were solidly wooden of aspect, with low circular crowns and triangular stiff brims.

The garb seemed grotesque; yet they took it so as a matter of course when once we ceased our comments—and they were so easy in it, so unconscious of it—that abruptly I realized it was my own viewpoint that held the strangeness. Between them, also, there was a difference of aspect—a rationality to their characters. The colors of their garments materially differed. Brett's clothes were

more sober—less vivid, less extreme. His shirt was a somber brown; Martt's was a glaring green. Martt's jacket had additional bangles fastened to its cloth, it rolled higher in the skirt; tassels depended from his elbows longer than those Brett wore. His jacket sleeves were fuller; his trousers flared more, and were a more brilliant hue. But I will say that when after a time I became in a measure accustomed to his looks, Martt was very handsome; and he carried himself with a sort of swinging, debonair grace and swagger wholly attractive.

They were strangers to us in their mode of dress; no one regarding them could have named a nation of earth or any of the habited planets from which they might have come. Yet the strangeness went deeper than their clothes. They seemed older. A vague aspect of command seemed upon them—especially did it envelop Brett, like an aura sensed but not seen. Martt's old jocularity was unchanged; no dignity, no reservation, no aloofness with us had been added to the new swagger. Yet beneath his laughter there seemed always a hidden solemnity. And then I saw it all—this subtle strangeness that clung to them—I saw it lurking in their eyes. Memories mirrored there; memories of things no man had seen and felt before. Eyes—and more especially Brett's eyes—which had seen, perhaps, too much.

II

It was Brett who began their narrative; began it with the slow, careful, precise phrasing of the scientist anxious to avoid error of memory; to be exact of every fact and detail. On his lap he held a book of notes, and another book of the many dial recordings. He consulted it.

"Our recorded time of starting was four minutes past midnight. Sixteen days ago, wasn't it, Father? Sixteen!"

He gave a queer laugh but did not comment upon his thoughts. "I had determined to start slowly. Martt would have rushed us, but I thought that caution was best until we were quite sure of the workings of these mechanisms new to us.

"I did not record our passing above the earth's atmosphere. But the vehicle was inordinately hot from the friction of our passage. Perhaps I took it too fast—at all events we did not bother with refrigeration since in Space we would so soon need the heaters. We sat sweltering at the main instrument table with the dials before us.

"I think, Father, that I followed your instructions carefully. The dials were all set and operating. The size dials stood motionless at unit 1. Our relative Time-dials were motionless at the original unit of earth Time; and the earth dial-chronometers ticked off the passing of your seconds and minutes. On the Space dials— when first I chanced to notice them—we had gone some 900 miles. Our velocity then had picked up to 1,500 miles an hour and was swiftly accelerating. The Time was 1 a. m.

"It is slow getting through the atmosphere, but now we were fairly on our way. As you suggested, Father, I was heading just a point off Mars where I could hold Jupiter and Saturn almost in a line ahead of us. They were all there visible through our floor window—we had turned over and were falling toward them. I was using a fraction only of the earth's repulsion, and holding steady with the selective attraction of Mars and the star-field behind it."

"We saw your aural ray," Martt put in. He was earnestly intent upon Brett's narrative. "We saw it—I saw it—through the spectrometer. The swing of it was apparent even at

that near distance. And we saw the Martian Mail coming in—they landed in Eurasia that night, I suppose. Say, they move in a hurry, don't they? And stop in a hurry when they get down close."

Brett went on: "We were still within the lower cone of the earth's shadow. But presently we emerged and came into the sunlight. The brilliant blackness of Space; and the cold by now had penetrated so that very soon we were glad enough to use the heaters.

"You know the details of a Martian voyage, Father. And you, Frank? This was no different except that having no necessity of stopping I reached a greater velocity than they generally obtain. A forty-hour trip, isn't it, Frank?"

"There's nearly always one of the minimum-distance trips at about that," I answered. "But you had some sixty million miles for yours. That's a lot longer than a minimum distance."

He nodded. "Yes. We came abreast of Mars—I suppose about a million miles away. Our Space-dials showed about sixty-two million miles traveled. We had been gone from you thirty-nine hours. Our average velocity had been something over a million and a half miles an hour, and with steadily increasing acceleration had reached then nearly three million an hour.

"That was as quick a trip as you anticipated, Father? But even so, we found it irksome. We alternated at the instrument board. Martt prepared most of the meals—beyond that and sleeping there was little to do. Except to watch for asteroids; but the mails have reported the region through there remarkably free of them this season. We saw none inside the Martian orbit closer than a million miles, which to such a low velocity as ours held no danger."

Dr. Gryce asked, "The air purifiers, Brett? You had no trouble?"

"No. Or very little, except just at first with the chlorate of potassium. I was telling you about passing Mars. We saw it rising slowly past us—saw it through a side window. A huge crescent, the sunlight on half its disk, but even the unlighted portion was plainly outlined. Above us was the thin crescent earth, with the sun behind it. The tongues of flame in the sun's envelope were plainer than I had ever seen them. We were falling away from the earth and sun, into the inky blackness of Space with its blazing white stars.

"During all this first portion of the trip we were eager to get more quickly advanced. Beyond Neptune's orbit, with the Solar System once behind us, we would feel like explorers, even though Nogar—he holds the record, doesn't he?—went once 27,000 million miles out."

Dr. Gryce put in: "His record was 27,600 million miles from our sun. At nearly five million miles an hour, which was his maximum velocity obtainable, that trip for the full return passage consumed—I think the total time was 461 days."

Brett went on, "That was the record. But even to go a single light-year at that velocity would have taken Nogar around 84 years—just going out a little light-year of distance, to say nothing of getting back! And we had so many thousands of light-years to travel even to get beyond the stars. It seemed stupendous—impossible."

"Naturally," said Dr. Gryce. "Impossible, of course, had you held to that size." They were directing their explanations at me. I nodded. "But you didn't stay that size?" I suggested.

"No, of course not," said Brett. "But for a time, we did—I was cautious from Mars to Jupiter, Father. Nogar plunged right through the asteroid region there—plunged

through at nearly his five million miles an hour velocity. I held down to three million. We kept a close watch, though Martt had a somewhat terrifying experience. Tell them, Martt."

Martt flushed a trifle. "It wasn't my fault—at least I didn't think so. At a velocity like that the space there between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter is horribly crowded. Brett was asleep. I sat by the instrument table staring down into the floor window at the black firmament into which we were dropping. You people take a voyage like this as a matter of course—but it was my first time off earth, and the beauty of it—of the heavens—well, I tell you it impressed me. The black firmament—those blazing constellations beneath us—the full moon of Jupiter every moment growing larger like a white round lamp down there.

"Well, anyway, perhaps, I was lost in thoughts of it—when leaping up out of the blackness came a great round silver disk. A hundred times the size of our full moon. Then a thousand. It was below me, but off to one side. It swept past, so close I could see its barren, rocky surface—a range of desolate gray mountains; and I could see, too, its rotation, like a ball tossed into the air slowly rotating. Before I could think to do anything—even to make a move—the asteroid went past, out of my field as I looked through the floor window. For a moment I saw it rising past a side window and then it was above us—gone completely beyond my sight in a moment or two. I want to tell you I was frightened—I called Brett down at once."

Brett laughed. "I found him white, shaking like a tower-trembler. If a collision had really threatened, he could have thrown the main Time-switch. Thrown us suddenly into the asteroid's past or future—I had told him that—but when the danger came, he never thought of it."

"I never did," Martt confessed.

"How close did the asteroid pass?" I asked. "I saw one once, on a Martian trip——"

"I suppose we passed it at a distance of some three thousand miles," Brett answered. "But at three million miles an hour we were traveling that distance in three or four seconds. It was a narrow escape. The asteroid's attraction had drawn us aside from our course—but I soon rectified that."

"I meant to explain about attraction a moment ago, Frank," Dr. Gryce interrupted. "The attraction of the vehicle on our planets is why Brett could not yet increase his size. Jupiter and Saturn were pulling the vehicle onward, and in direct proportion to the mass, of course, the vehicle was pulling at them. An infinitesimal pull—but had Brett increased its size materially—while still close to our planets—the vehicle would have been a seriously disturbing element. I did not want that. Indeed, with any great size-increase, the vehicle moving out there would have thrown our whole system into chaos."

Brett said, "I was careful to obey you, Father. We were safely beyond Saturn—and Uranus and Neptune were on the other side of the sun—before I even touched the size switch. From the orbit of Mars to that of Jupiter there are some 334 million miles between the points we crossed. We were about 112 hours making the voyage. I kept us well away—some ten million miles. But the planet was a beautiful sight, assuming every phase from full to crescent as we passed. You have never been so close, Father? Nor you, Frank?"

"Nor I," spoke up Frannie. She said it in a whimsical fashion of pathos, as though to make us all realize that she had been neglected.

Brett laughed affectionately. "No, nor you, little sister. Well, it's a beautiful sight. You can see it similarly in the telescope, but somehow, at the same visual distance the naked eye shows it indefinably different. A beautiful silver disk with the broad dark bands upon it and the red spot glowing like a lantern in its lower hemisphere.

"Our velocity was slackened for a time as we passed Jupiter, since I had to lose its great attractive force and turn a neutral side to it. But once by it, with it blazing as a gigantic thin crescent above us, I used a full power of its repulsion. We gained velocity rapidly. With the region of minor planets passed I had no fear of using all the velocity we could obtain. I think Nogar was unskilful in the handling of his vehicle; at all events, before we reached the neighborhood of Saturn, we had attained a velocity of seven and a half million miles an hour. It was the greatest velocity we reached."

"But," I exclaimed, "but Brett, at seven and one-half million miles an hour, in your whole life-time—whether you changed your Time-rate or not, you would have to live those hours—in a whole life-time at that velocity you wouldn't get one-quarter of the distance even to the nearest star!"

"No," he agreed. "But I began using the size-change after we passed Saturn——"

I interrupted again. "I've been wondering about that—I don't quite see——"

"I'll make it clear to you, Frank, in a moment," Dr. Gryce put in. "Go on, Brett."

"We were well past Saturn before I changed our size at all. Our average velocity along there was six million miles an hour—it was a run of about seventy-five hours. We would have been—even at our maximum of seven and one-half million miles an hour—more than another 240 hours getting past Neptune's orbit. It was too tedious. We determined, since Uranus and Neptune were in other parts of their orbits—far on the other side of our sun—I decided that once we were well beyond Saturn, I would start our increase of size. We were seventy million miles beyond Saturn, with nothing of importance ahead of us but the distant stars, when I determined to start the change. The space there was comparatively deserted—a few asteroids—sometimes we could go nearly an hour without even sighting one.

"With Martt beside me—we were both a little timid about it, naturally—I threw over the switch and started our growth."

He paused for the length of a breath. "It was extraordinary—all our experience of the voyage from that moment was extraordinary. I hardly know how to begin telling you. . . ."

III

DR. GRYCE interrupted. "Just a minute, Brett—I want to make absolutely clear to Frank the principles involved in this change of size in relation to velocity."

"May I ask a question first?" I hazarded.

"All you like," said Brett.

"I'm wondering why in your normal size you could attain no greater velocity than seven and one-half million miles an hour. Theoretically, you know, a freely falling body will accelerate to infinity. And with repulsion added—a body, not only falling, but being *pushed* downward——"

Frannie said, "Nogar found his approximate limit at five million——"

"Our limitations were similar to his," Martt put in.

"I know," I said. "I remember in the public newscasting they said ——"

"We found the same conditions," Brett put in. "Our vehicle—any vehicle traveling in outer Space—is not strictly a freely falling body. For low velocities—the general voyaging from here to Mercury, Venus or Mars—Space may almost be considered a vacuum. But it is not a vacuum, as we know. The imponderable, widely separated atoms of the ether—to use the ancient word—begin to be a factor at velocities over three million miles an hour. The drag became increasingly noticeable——"

"And the heat of the friction warmed us up," Martt put in. "At six million miles an hour we were hot, let me tell you. Sweltering—even with the full refrigeration units going."

"That friction held us to seven and one-half million as our limit," Brett added. "Anything else, Frank?"

"Yes, I was wondering about our aural ray here. Could you still see it?"

"Oh yes. Our sun of the Solar System had dwindled—small, but white and brilliant. With the naked eye the little star which was our earth showed very faint but distinguishable. With the aurometer—even using its spreading field of vision so that it embraced all that portion of the sky—we could see your beam sweeping slowly across the field as the earth rotated."

"And the myrdoscope?" I suggested. "Hadn't you tried again to locate the image of that girl?" My heart thumped as I said it.

He nodded. "Beyond Jupiter, when the long hours of inactivity hung on us, I spent many of them searching ahead of us with the myrdoscope. At last I picked up the image of the girl—held it for a few moments."

"There was no change?" Dr. Gryce said eagerly.

"No. The little distance we had traveled made no change—in fact, my smaller instrument, Father, showed it rather less clearly."

"I mean no change in the girl's attitude," Dr. Gryce insisted. "No change in the attacking giant—or those grinning little dwarfs at the girl's ankle?"

"None. But she was aware of them. On her face was stark terror—as we had seen it from here, Father, a month before. I noticed that the giant's forward step had nearly been completed—and the climbing dwarf was holding tightly to her sandal cord."

Brett gazed at me inquiringly but I shook my head. "That's all I have to ask," I said. "Go ahead, Brett. You were telling us about how you started the size-change——"

Dr. Gryce put in. "I think you had best proceed, Brett. And then if there is anything Frank does not understand, we can stop and make it clear."

He nodded, but for a moment he hesitated. "I flung over the switch to start our growth," he said slowly. "It was the beginning of all those strangely weird experiences which followed now one upon the other. Frightening at first. . . ."

IV

He paused briefly, then went on: "Our first sensation was one of shock—a reeling of the senses. But it was not severe—it passed almost at once. We found ourselves clinging there to the instrument table. To me the room seemed swaying dizzily. My forehead was damp with cold moisture; a nausea possessed me. I was oppressed; the air of the room was heavy to breathe."

"The air was snapping with the current," said Martt. "I could see

it, and feel it tingling against my face. And it was heavy to breathe, as Brett says."

Brett resumed: "But we felt better after a moment. I saw the change first on the dials. The pointer of the lowest unit dial of the size series was slowly but visibly moving. I watched as it crept from 1 to 2. We had doubled in size. I gazed about the room. It was unchanged; and now as my body rapidly adjusted itself to the new conditions, I began to feel almost normal. Except a queer whirring in my head, and the nausea which persisted for perhaps an hour, I felt no evidence of the growth. The room, the vehicle was untrembling. No slightest evidence within the vehicle of the size-change going on—except the creeping pointer of the lowest dial. It was moving faster; it had reached 10. The pointer of the dial beside it—registering in units of a hundred—now seemed stirring."

Brett gazed at us earnestly. "I want to make myself absolutely clear. We were then—I suppose a minute or so had elapsed—we were ten times our original size——"

"Much faster than the vehicle grew in the garden," I exclaimed.

"Yes. I had chanced the possibility of severe shock and thrown the lever at once to a quarter strength. Martt and Frannie, in the garden, had put it on only to the one-hundredth part of its power. At all intensities, the growth, you understand, constantly accelerates. At unit 10, which we reached in possibly the first minute, we were ten times our starting size—that is, for earth measurements, our vehicle from base to tower-top was then one-tenth of a mile. But soon the pointer had passed 50. And then 100—and the pointer of the hundred-unit dial had crept to 1.

"With recovered normality of senses we had gone to the windows. I want you to visualize first what always before we had seen. An inky black void everywhere surrounding us, in the center of which seemingly we hung motionless. The brilliant firmament of stars, freed from the distortion of earth's atmosphere; glittering, blazing like great diamonds. Pure white, blue-white, or tinged with yellow and red. The whole extent of the heavens swarming with them. The huge, spiral nebulous masses fleecy white, with tiny points of blazing white fire in them. And behind them all that distant ring of seeming star-dust—immeasurably distant yet glowing like a silver veil, which in the ancient books they called the 'Milky Way.'

"Near at hand, above us were the tiny planets of our Solar System. The sun, only a pale white disk from out here near Saturn; the earth—a star very faint; red Mars, a tiny reddish dot. But Jupiter was brilliant; and Saturn from our proximity was stupendously beautiful. The globe itself—a great silver disk, with the sunlight to make a narrow portion of it into a blazing crescent. The darkened areas of the globe, even on the shadowed portion, were plain almost as the bands of Jupiter. And Saturn's rings! Concentric rings—the inner one a trifle darker—opened up to a narrow angle—a glowing silver band like a broad hat-brim encircling the planet—a hat-brim over 37,000 miles broad.

"This we saw, with ourselves of unchanging size. But now we were growing. The change was at first apparent only in the aspect of Saturn—since it was closest to us. The planet seemed to become a little smaller—shrinking and creeping toward us. A contraction of its size—and as though the space between us were diminishing. Yet—as a seeming paradox—the visual diameter of the globe and the rings remained almost the same.

"It is difficult to describe. We seemed moving closer to Saturn, yet

in no sense was there any apparent motion. The effect—the result—of seeming motion—not the motion itself. Martt presently went back to watch the dials. He called out to me when we had reached unit 1,000. A thousand times our original size—the vehicle now ten miles in earthly height. The change had now affected very slightly the entire firmament. Everywhere a seeming contraction—not so much in the aspect of the blazing star-points, but in the black void of Space itself. As though the void were smaller — contracted so that everything in it were of necessity a little nearer to us. But it was as yet barely noticeable. I might even have thought it a psychological co-action with the change in Saturn's aspect—a change unmistakable.

"Saturn, as we grew, had been seemingly smaller and coming visually nearer to us. Yet our velocity away from it was—in our original size—seven and one-half million miles an hour. Can I make you realize that the effect of *both* motions was apparent? It was as though we were moving forward to lengthen a dwindling distance, with Saturn following after us simultaneously to shorten it.

"It was at the thousand unit point —ourselves then ten miles of earthly height—that I shut off the size-switch. Of visual diameter, Saturn had really not altered materially."

Brett stopped as though carefully to choose his words. "I'm striving to give you a clear picture. A distant object of great size may appear of the same diameter as something smaller and closer. But you can generally tell which is which. There is a difference of aspect—impossible to describe, but readily seen. Saturn was like that—the change in the planet was like a progressive change from the one condition to the other. It had appeared large and distant; it changed, to be smaller and closer. Just before I shut off the size-switch, when our rate of growth had become comparatively rapid, Saturn took on other motions—I'll tell you about them in a moment.

"Do I make myself clear? I want to. . . . With our growth checked, there was at once a striking, visual result. We seemed receding from Saturn so fast that its apparent diameter dwindled very rapidly—a normal dwindling of rapidly added distance. Presently it was a mere star—then a pin-point of light. Then it was vanished. Our other planets of the Solar System had preceded Saturn into invisibility. Then our sun itself became so faint a star that I lost it. We were beyond the Solar System—itself wholly lost to the naked eye among the great star-clusters enveloping it."

V

"WAIT," I exclaimed. "There is so much I want to ask you, Brett."

Frannie interposed timidly: "Did you say, Brett, that on earth the vehicle then would have been ten miles in height?"

"Yes," he agreed.

She commented, "Then your relative Time-dials must have been visibly moving——"

Dr. Gryce hastily interrupted: "The practical workings of the inherent Time-change I want Brett to explain carefully. You did not move the vehicle in Time, did you, Brett?"

"No sir. Not then."

I must have looked puzzled, for Dr. Gryce added: "We mean, Frank, that the vehicle could have traveled in Time—in earth-Time, for instance, to go into our past or our future. Brett had not done that. But immediately the vehicle started a size-change, you understand, there automatically began a Time-change inherent to that growth. Normal to it, let me say."

"Oh, yes," I nodded. "I remember you explained that. In relation to its size——"

"I'll put it this way," Dr. Gryce went on. "That girl out there is moving through Time at a definite rate. Let us say a year of our Time would be measured as a second of hers."

"Less than that," Martt interjected.

"Yes lad, I know. But those rough figures will serve for the present comparison." He turned back to me. "Keep that in mind, Frank. Now conceive Brett and Martt changing progressively upward in size, from what they are here on earth, to a size normal to that girl and the realm she lives in. A corresponding Time-change must take place. At every point of the voyage in Time and size, the relative values must agree; the vehicle's Time-rate always must be in inverse proportion to its position in size."

I nodded. "I think I understand. You mean that when in size the vehicle had progressed half-way from our size to the girl's, that then the vehicle's normal Time-rate would be half-way between our Time and hers?"

"Exactly, Frank."

"At this ten-mile size what percentage of the size-journey had been made?" I asked. I smiled. "I'm trying to imagine how large that girl may be."

Brett said quickly, "I'll tell you that later. It was some distance farther on before I could calculate such relative values even as approximations."

Frannie said, "At that point, Brett, the vehicle began speeding into the earth's future, didn't it?"

Dr. Gryce exclaimed: "Child, that will only lead us into philosophical discussion. Beyond the realm of mathematics——"

"I don't think so, Father," Brett said quietly. "I would say that since everything—Size, Time and Space—is relative, depending wholly on the viewpoint of the observer—that Frannie's question is simple enough. To me as observer—to my consciousness there in the vehicle—every given instant was the Present. The earth was out there in Space, revolving about its sun; rotating on its axis—its movements to my consciousness *faster* than before. To me it was the Present. The earth was there. I saw it through the electro-telescope. I also saw your aural ray through the aurometer. The ray swept the sky with a rapid sweep, since to my altered Time-rate the earth was rotating faster. But every given instant was my Present.

"However, compare my consciousness to yours on earth. The earth—rotating faster relative to me—had, while I watched there, made, let us say, a full rotation in that first five minutes of my vigil. Relative to me—it was the earth's future Time. I was gazing upon earth in its *tomorrow*. So I think that I was, as Frannie said, speeding into the earth's future."

Frannie was triumphant. Dr. Gryce said smilingly, "You put it clearly, Brett. But it's a philosophical and metaphysical viewpoint nevertheless. You spoke of Saturn's having another apparent motion near the end of your size-change?"

"Yes," said Brett. "As our Time-rate became materially slower, the speeding up of all the motions inherent to the planets grew visible. Saturn's rotation on its axis became readily visible through the telescope. And the globe began very slowly shifting sidewise—at nearly right angles to our course—the visual result of the intensification of its orbital movement. . . . You were going to ask a question, Frank, a moment ago?"

I had not forgotten it. "You were telling us, Brett, how you stopped your growth at the ten-mile size. Almost immediately, you said, Saturn receded into an invisibility of distance. The entire Solar System vanished into distance. You had been traveling only seven and one-half million miles an hour before changing size. It was the new velocity I wanted to ask about. The whole question of velocity relative to size."

"Relative!" Brett exclaimed. "That's the keynote to it, Frank. Two differing viewpoints, always. Keep them both in mind—the viewpoint of earth-size, and the viewpoint of the vehicle-size. I'll try and explain it now. Once clear to you, our whole experience will clarify to your understanding. Conceive, from your external viewpoint of earth, the vehicle out there in Space dropping with a velocity of seven and one-half million miles an hour. That was its maximum, owing to the ether-friction. It started to increase in size. Hence its mass grew—in proportion directly as the cube. As the mass grew greater, the atoms of the ether became of themselves relatively smaller, less ponderable, less capable of exerting their frictional drag.

"This should be very clear to you, Frank. In a vacuum, a feather and a bit of lead fall at equal rates. The mass—the weight—has nothing to do with it. But in air—where there is a friction—the heavier object falls faster. The vehicle was like that. Its mass, so enormously increased, gave it a greatly increased maximum velocity. It picked up velocity rapidly with its growth. The formulas involved are intricate—I need only say that after forty-nine minutes of traveling at the ten-mile size, we had again reached maximum. It was about 200 million miles a minute."

"A minute!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. That is 12,000 million miles an hour, as against seven and one-half million. The vehicle's length, breadth and width had each increased to a thousand times their former size. Its mass was the product of the three—hence one thousand million times greater.

"These are all approximate to the actual figures, you understand. Round numbers are less confusing. Our resultant velocity, however, was 200 million miles a minute, at the end of the first hour. We were well beyond the Solar System by then."

Frannie asked, "Brett, why didn't Saturn appear to recede until after you had stopped your growth?"

"That was merely optical, Frannie. Our velocity away from Saturn was steadily increasing. But with our increasing size, the space seemed dwindling—as though Saturn were following after us. With the growth checked there was a visual reaction—an apparent leaping away. It was merely optical. Anything else?"

"I'd like to know," I said, "the relation of your Time in the vehicle at the ten-mile size—its relation to our earth-Time."

"The proportion of one to one thousand," he answered readily. "Seven seconds to me, then, was about two hours on earth. Could I have seen the earth when I reached that maximum, it would have made a complete rotation on its axis—a day of yours—in a minute and twenty-four seconds to me.

"It's all clear, isn't it? Suppose I go back to the details of our trip? With ten miles of earthly size, at a velocity of 200 million miles a minute we were dropping into the black void of Space. The Solar System was lost presently, even to telescopic vision, but with the naked eye the firmament of stars was very little changed. I searched with the myrdoscope for the image of the girl, but did not chance to pick it up. We were hot again within the vehicle,

from the ether friction—as hot as we had been before.

"Beneath us, in the star-field for which I was heading, was Alpha Centauri. It is, as you know, one of the very closest stars to our Solar System—to our earth. In miles, roughly some 25,000,000,000,000. Four and a third light-years of distance, 4.35 light-years to be exact. At 200 million miles a minute we would have been some eighty-eight days getting there."

"I couldn't have stood a trip so long," Martt exclaimed. "I told him we'd have to increase our size again. Nearly three months to get to the nearest star—with others a thousand times farther on!"

"There was no reason for us to stay so small," Brett agreed. "Out there, with the Solar System so far away, I had no fear of disturbing it."

Again I interrupted. "Brett, the vehicle's velocity was then much greater than the velocity of light——"

"About eighteen times greater."

"It seems inconceivable," I added. "Impossible for any tangible entity in Space to attain such velocity."

"Ah, but Frank, that's where you're using the wrong viewpoint," Dr. Gryce exclaimed warmly. "You're still imagining yourself an observer on earth. But take the viewpoint of the vehicle. Space was proportionately smaller than before. Brett gives you the earth-size figures in order to avoid confusion. From the vehicle's enlarged viewpoint, Brett, what was its comparative velocity?"

"About twelve million miles an hour," Brett said. "As against a former seven and one-half million. Not so great a change, Frank?"

"No," I admitted. "But——"

"But you can not quite grasp how the two velocities can be the same? Existing simultaneously in the same vehicle, only with a differing viewpoint?"

I think that was my trouble. I nodded, and he said at once, "To the larger viewpoint, Frank, the Space had diminished a thousand times, to make a thousand miles become as one mile. Not an *actual* change—a relative change only. But twelve million miles an hour, with distance diminished one thousand times, is the same as twelve thousand million miles an hour with the distance factor unaltered. You see that, of course. Or consider the relative Time-values. The vehicle's Time was seven seconds to about two hours. The exact figures were one to one-thousand. In the vehicle we lived a thousand earth-seconds in one. Applied, then, to the two viewpoints of velocity, it gives identical results for the distance traveled. Whatever the factors involved—the earth-Time; the vehicle-Time; the Space relative to the vehicle; or to the earth; and the velocity, relative either to the vehicle-size or earth-size—the result must be mathematically the same. You see? And, Frank, in describing the progressive size-changes into which we now plunged, I shall give you always Space with earth-standards, and our velocity from the viewpoint of earth. It reached tremendous figures; but you are to remember always that of actuality they must be divided by the relative size factor. They were never greater than you would have expected the vehicle to obtain.

"I was saying that we were headed for Alpha Centauri. Again we started the growth. I threw the switch to its fullest intensity. Martt stayed to watch the dials; I sat on the floor, gazing down through the window at the star-field spread out beneath me. When my head had cleared from the shock of starting the growth, I sat absorbed in watching. Soon visible movements ap-

peared. The star-drifts began to be apparent. And we were going toward these stars; the apparent shortening Space, added to our increasing relative velocity, made their approach visible. In the field to the sides of us, the stars were shifting upward. Those in front were spreading apart with a movement very slow but perceptible as we dropped toward them.

"I do not know how long I sat there; Martt occasionally would call to me from his post at the dials, but I hardly heard him. Alpha Centauri presently came rushing forward. As you know, it is a binary—twin stars a few hundred million miles apart, its components revolving about each other with a period of eighty-one years. It had been one blazing white point of light. Then it separated into two. They stayed visually small, for they were dwindling before the vehicle's growth; but they came rushing toward us. Soon I could see them separated by a narrow black ribbon of the void; and could see them revolving one about the other."

"An eighty-one-year period, and you could see it!" I exclaimed.

"Yes—a very slow movement, but I could see it. I would have passed between them—the ribbon of Space there was widening rapidly, the stars themselves had become great, blazing white-hot suns. But I was afraid of the heat; I altered our course to present a slightly repellent side. The firmament turned partly over. The two stars swung up past our side window; in visual diameter larger than our earthly sun—they mounted upward, closed in above us, drew together to form one; a sun at first; then a brilliant star; then faint, until with the naked eye I lost it.

"Beneath us, the star-field in front was rushing upward much faster now. The constellations opening; the stars shifting—everywhere was movement—strange movement, unnatural, fantastic. I confess, Father, that I was injudicious. Martt was absorbed, fascinated in watching the dials, and when occasionally he would call to me, I told him everything was all right."

"I didn't know what was going on," said Martt. "You told me to sit there and I sat there."

"Of course you didn't know what was going on," Brett smiled. "But I did, and I think for a time I lost my wits. The stars were thick and close around us. The nebulæ were opened into individual points of fire. Everywhere was movement, unreal. Stars rotating visibly; binaries shifting about each other; other stars shifting about each other; other stars seeming to enlarge in size, or to diminish, to swing this way or that with all the optical vagaries of our velocity, our changing Time and Size; and always those of the star-field in front—beneath us—spreading to the sides, rushing past our windows, closing in above us and fading into invisibility.

"A myriad universes in fantastic motion. And suddenly I realized that these giant suns were very close to us, and very small! Some I had recognized—blazing globes 100 million miles and more in diameter, and thought myself ten times that far from them. But it was not so. I stared at a giant globe 100 million miles in diameter, and with my viewpoint suddenly changed I saw that it was no more than a tiny glowing meteor, sweeping past a few miles away!

"All this star-field, little balls, rolling close upon us. A miracle that none hit us, though some time before, I had had the wit to call to Martt to make all the faces repellent. By inertia only, we plunged onward, repelling what lay in our path.

"I saw a wandering asteroid—a few hundred miles perhaps in diameter. It was whirling on its axis like

a ball thrown into the air. A whimsical humor—a madness perhaps—had descended upon me. There was nothing but the asteroid momentarily close before us, and I called to Martt to throw attraction into the bottom of the vehicle. The asteroid came rushing. But shrinking—shrinking until I laughed aloud to see it dwindle to a ball I could have held in my hand; and dwindle further until impotently it struck the floor window with a tiny point of fire from its fusing rock and metal. A burning cinder which scarce would have hurt me had I caught it in my naked hands.

VI

"How long my mood of ironic madness may have lasted I can not say. I barely noticed our actual entry into the Galactic Plane. Enormous suns whirling past, now relatively not many times bigger than the vehicle itself. Others, distant a mile or so—or a billion miles if you want the other viewpoint—with their magnified drift making them dart crazily past. I gave no heed to passing time; I remember only that at last the star-field beneath us was thinning out. Stray clusters — a myriad glowing little balls hurled aside by our rush. But there were visibly less and less of them, until, quite suddenly, I realized that unbroken inky darkness lay ahead. And to the sides and above us, the star clusters, nebulæ swirling like silver mist—it was all fading. Winking little points up there behind us—winking and vanishing.

"We were in blackness unbroken. Dropping into a void of blackness with velocity inconceivable. Suddenly I was frightened. Stiff from so long upon the floor, I rose and hurried to Martt. We shut off the size-switch; made all the faces repellent. But there was nothing to repel; nothing to stop our downward rush into that blackness. It seemed all at once a blackness pregnant with unseen things of fearsome aspect. . . . The size-dials showed us to be near unit 50,000,000. Fifty million times our original size! The vehicle 500,000 miles high!

"The relative Time-dials—showing relative earth-Time—were whirling. Our Time in the vehicle was less than a single second to a year on earth. My mind leaped back to you. Every second we lived there in the vehicle you here on earth were living more than a year. A century of yours was little more than a minute to us. The earth's future, whirling on a thousand years while Martt and I sat there confused at the instrument table. A tiny little earth, spinning like a top upon its axis, flashing around its tiny sun with a complete revolution every second!

"The velocity indicators, as well, were in rapid motion. The indicator of the miles-per-hour unit was an indistinguishable blur. And miles per minute—and per second—we could read none of them, so fast were they moving. The light-year distance pointers were in motion. We were piling up light-years of distance every moment. The total stood—as momentarily I read it—at between eleven and twelve thousand light-years of total distance traveled. Light, speeding at 186,000 miles a second, must go a year to make a light-year unit of distance. And we had gone nearly 12,000 light-years! I read our present velocity on the light-year velocity-dial. It was 3480 light-years per hour! And still rapidly accelerating!

"The panic of fear possessed us at the strangeness of it all—at that void of blackness — soundlessness — into which we were plunging; and even our plunge unmarked by the faintest trembling of the vehicle. A panic. I started to use the aurometer to search for your ray. Absurd! The

absurdity of it made me laugh hysterically. Your ray had been extinguished thousands of years in my Past. I tried the myrdoscope—to locate the image of the girl—to verify our direction, for abruptly I realized I had, in that empty black void, nothing by which I might locate our position.

"The myrdoscope was inoperative! I could not locate the girl-image—nor anything else. I tried with the electro-telescope at its greatest power—tried frantically to pick up some star-image behind us. I could not. I did not think they were as yet beyond its range—it merely had gone dead. The current in it would not hum. It was dead like the myrdoscope. We wondered then if our dials were working accurately. In our panic we doubted everything. And knew, with a stark terror upon us—knew that we were lost. Lost perhaps in Size and Time. And lost in black Space, empty, soundless, unfathomable!"

The meeting with the girl, and the thrilling encounter with giants dwindling out of unfathomable largeness, will be described in the thrilling chapters which bring this story to a conclusion in next month's issue.

The Song of the Bats

***By* ROBERT E. HOWARD**

The dusk was on the mountain
And the stars were dim and frail
When the bats came flying, flying
From the river and the vale
To wheel against the twilight
And sing their witchly tale.

"We were kings of eld!" they chanted,
"Rulers of a world enchanted;
"Every nation of creation
"Owned our lordship over men.
"Diadems of power crowned us,
"Then rose Solomon to confound us,
"Flung his web of magic round us,
"In the forms of beasts he bound us,
"So our rule was broken then."

Whirling, wheeling into westward,
Fled they in their phantom flight;
Was it but a wing-beat music
Murmured through the star-gemmed night?
Or the singing of a ghost clan
Whispering of forgotten night?

LISTENING DEATH

by Don Robert Catlin

"Get back, or I'll smash this bottle on the floor!" he cried.

"I PERFORMED a decompression operation. First trepanning the skull, making a circular hole and piercing it, I withdrew the precious contents of the pineal gland and also the cerebrospinal fluid. I had no opportunity for quite some time to make use of the stimulative serum thus obtained, but it was preserved carefully; and, when I was later asked to operate on the brain of a man known for his dull-wittedness, I inoculated the patient with the serum. The operation was a splendid success, the results more than I had hoped for. Today, that dull-witted fellow is amazing all who know him by displaying flashes of positive genius! But enough of that—after all, I had fallen short of that which I had set out to do. Delving farther . . . ."

The speaker, Dr. Frank Whitley, broke off his discourse and surveyed the candidly puzzled features of his visitors. There were three of them, all men of the medical profession who had gained renown in surgery.

"Delving farther," continued Dr. Whitley, "I have made certain discoveries which I shall shortly disclose. But before going into that, I wish to say a word by way of preface. As all of you know, I have more or less dropped active practise to devote my attention to experimental work." Settling himself comfortably in his chair, Dr. Whitley shot a quick glance at the others. "Have you ever given thought to the fact that, were it possible to preserve the brains of our greatest inventors, savants and statesmen, almost incalculable good might result in future years? That unborn generations might, in hours of greatest need, have at their disposal the marvelous intellects of history's supermen?"

"It appears that the operation you have just described might solve that question," put in Dr. Reynolds.

Whitley shook his head. "Not so," he said; "though at first I thought as you. No, the transplanting, by inoculation, of the pineal gland contents and the cerebrospinal fluid does nothing but impart a portion of the original intellect. By the time several such transplantings had been accomplished, precious little of the original would remain because of contamination with lesser brains. I will concede that this disclosure caused me to fear that my fondest hopes were not to be realized."

Dr. Hazard, a white-haired surgeon of the old school, wagged his leonine head. "I take it, then, that you have been working upon some scheme to preserve through the ages the brain-power of our greatest men? You younger chaps are forever digging up something startling—but I shouldn't be down-hearted if I were you. Your success in transferring the vital secretions of the brain should do much in treating the feeble-minded."

"That, obviously, will be the ultimate use of that particular operation," assented Whitley. "But I am far from being downcast."

He arose and walked across the surgery to the door of an adjoining room. In a moment he was wheeling an operating table into the presence of his colleagues. Upon the table lay a still, covered figure which was, presumably, a cadaver. Dr. Whitley threw back the covering and disclosed the cold, white body.

"Will you gentlemen be kind enough to examine this?" he asked, indicating the cadaver.

Doctors Hazard, Reynolds and Truman went to the table and needed but a moment to ascertain that life was extinct, that the man was dead.

Whitley nodded at their verdict. A trace of a smile appeared in the corners of his sensitive mouth, and his lean, pale face lit up.

"Please be seated once more, gentlemen; and, I beg of you, be patient with me when I tell you that this body has lain just as it now is for more than four months!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Hazard. Then: "I beg pardon——"

"That's quite all right, Doctor," smiled Whitley. "To resume, then, the coherent trend of what I have been telling you: at the time of my greatest gloom over the failure of my brain-secretion inoculation, a noted Egyptologist unearthed the tomb and body of a long-dead Pharaoh. The association of ideas—preservation of body and preservation of brain—gave me further stimulation. Very well, then, I thought, since preservation of brain alone was denied me, I should preserve the entire body! I determined to conquer the mystery of the ages—and I have done so! For years I experimented along those lines: perfecting a preservative, an embalming fluid if you will, which would keep flesh and blood in an absolutely perfect state. This I have accomplished, and as witness I have my friend over there upon the table—one Blair Wilson, a pugilistic gentleman of doubtful antecedents."

"Do you mean, Doctor, that this body has been—er, embalmed with——"

"Exactly," Whitley answered young Dr. Truman. "Some four months past, he stumbled into my office. He was badly beaten up—suffering from contusions—and he fainted while I was administering a hypodermic. I was alone with him, having long since, as you know, dispensed with office girls and assistants. Judging by the man's appearance that he could drop from sight without incurring comment, I acted

upon impulse and injected my formula into his veins, having but lately completed my calculations."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed old Dr. Hazard.

"The man was an ideal subject upon which to experiment, Dr. Hazard! If I had erred in my calculations, his death was of no consequence to anyone but himself; a good riddance, in fact, for I rather suspect he has criminal tendencies. Obversely, if I succeeded, in a few months at most I should return his worthless life to him; and, through his services, science would have learned much. Professional ethics, you say, Doctor? My dear colleague, how many of us have lost patients because we dallied to experiment with some interesting matter! What is one life compared to the betterment of all life? But to continue: I injected my preparation into his veins. He sank into a stupor; respiration ceased; all vital organs completely stopped functioning. My preservative had been carried to every tissue of the flesh, through the blood. Life was extinct; the man was dead. And yet—decomposition did not set in!"

Dr. Reynolds shrewdly summed up the matter: "If, as you say, Whitley, this occurred four months ago, then your formula must have been accurately compounded. You have put to shame the embalmers of centuries past! I suppose you've kept check of temperatures?"

Dr. Whitley smiled wanly. "Truly, I had not erred. But I preferred to wait some time before making public my discovery. I wanted to be doubly sure before returning life into that dead body. Oh yes; I forgot to tell you that there is an antidote to the preserving fluid. At last, my dear sirs, I know the time has come. Here, in this surgery, is the means to prolong for eternity, if need be, the master brains and supreme intellects of the world!"

"I am almost convinced, my dear Whitley, that you have divulged a wonderful thing," murmured old Dr. Hazard.

"With all modesty, I have, Doctor. Presently I shall restore life to that dead man upon the table, just as might be replaced upon earth, upon demand, any great man into whose veins had been injected my formula. And let me say here and now, gentlemen, that as soon as I have revived Blair Wilson I shall refute once and for all time any accusations of fakery by submitting myself to an inoculation so that you may experiment upon my own body. Belief and positive knowledge are matters entirely at variance; and as I've the courage of my convictions I demand that I be accorded an opportunity to demonstrate upon my own person the authenticity of my disclosures."

"There's hardly need of that," smiled Dr. Reynolds. "We all know that the man upon the table is dead, and if you bring him to life there can hardly be any doubt but that you have performed a surgical miracle!"

But Dr. Whitley merely smiled. He wheeled the operating table to the center of the room. "The preservative fluid," he went on as he prepared to administer the antidote, "will be utterly destroyed by this second injection, which will eat its way through his veins, running rampant."

Dr. Truman, youngest of the four surgeons, displayed unusual interest and animation. "I'm not following you, Whitley; I'm way ahead of you! When the antidote has eaten up and destroyed the preservative, you use adrenal chloride——"

Dr. Whitley was sterilizing some instruments. "Correct," he took time to answer, nodding his approv-

al at the younger man. "As we know, adrenal chloride is the most powerful and energetic heart stimulant known to science." With swift, sure fingers he injected a solution of the antidote into the veins of the recumbent Blair Wilson. "Now, allowing exactly three minutes for the antidote to perform its function, we have the subject in the customary state following natural death. A solution of the supra-renal capsule . . . ."

INTEREST growing in their eyes, the three surgeons watched with fascination as Dr. Whitley forced the powerful drug into the muscles of the dead man's heart. Then, as instruments clattered dully on the receiving tray, they sprang to Whitley's assistance. Deft hands massaged, kneading the cold flesh. . . . .

Dr. Hazard looked up with a queer light in his eyes. "I am wondering what this man will think when he finds himself here—after a lapse of four months——"

"Money will speak his language," laughed Dr. Whitley. Turning to the patient, he uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. "You will note that the pulse . . . . The eyes! The eyes are opening!" And then, smiling down into the upturned face, "Feeling all right, old man? Your arm is hurting you? Legs, too? That will cease in a moment——"

Whitley whirled to face his colleagues. "Are you satisfied?"

"The thing is absurd—impossible—and yet—and yet——" Old Dr. Hazard gasped as he saw the supine figure twitching and moving about spasmodically.

Dr. Whitley was helping the revived man to his feet. "There, I know that you are feeling rather shaky, Wilson. Just relax in this chair. Now—I must confess that I have taken the liberty to do some experimental work on your person, Wilson. And though I assure you that no ill effects will result, I feel that I not only owe you a debt of gratitude but a monetary reward as well. I have here a release, written in legal form, from any and all claims you might hereafter bring against me should you at any time feel that my unwarranted actions entitle you to redress under the law. If you will sign this release, I shall tender you one thousand dollars—in cash."

The ex-pugilist seemed in a daze. His eyes, glazed over like some wild thing's, swept the circle of forms confronting him. A trembling hand passed over his face, and when he spoke his voice was harsh and rasping. "You gimme them thousand bucks before you change your mind!"

Dr. Whitley threw a quick glance at his colleagues. "That's fine, my man. Just sign here—and now Dr. Hazard and Dr. Reynolds will sign as witnesses—good!" He folded the paper and placed it in his pocket, then handed the dazed man ten one-hundred dollar bills. "How are you feeling now?"

The man was rubbing his arms. "Kinda numb, like I had the cramps or something," he rasped. "Kinda tingling all over, an' I got a headache——"

"Try and relax, Wilson. And drink this." He handed the ex-pugilist a stimulant.

Then, crossing the room, Dr. Whitley busied himself at his desk. A phial of some greenish-blue, mottled liquid he placed in the center of the broad top, and beside it a sheet of paper upon which were several closely typed lines. His body bent to shield his actions, he thrust a hypodermic needle into a vein in his forearm.

When he turned to face the others a curious smile of triumph tinged his lips. "I knew that you three would

not be willing to see me undergo the inoculation, gentlemen . . . . No; it is too late, now. I've injected the preservative." And to Blair Wilson, groggily reclining in the easy chair, he added, "I am taking the same treatment I gave you, so you will see that no harmful after-results will ensue, otherwise I'd not subject myself to it."

The three surgeons were uneasy, apprehension gripping them. "But, Doctor——"

"I have only a very few minutes, gentlemen! If you will take notes as the drug takes effect . . . . ! On my desk you will find explicit directions as to the administering of the antidote, and the phial containing it." His eyes drooped for a moment. "A slow, creeping fire seems to be shrouding me——" Again that curious smile of triumph tinged his lips. "The courage of my convictions, eh, gentlemen?" He shuddered. "Perhaps I'd best lie down, for a numbness has taken possession of me——"

Gentle hands aided him as he climbed to the operating table; and over the prostrate form Dr. Hazard's old eyes met the horrified ones of Dr. Reynolds.

Whitley gave a little sigh; his body was convulsed; and then he lay quite still.

"Is he——?" young Truman asked in a strained voice.

Dr. Hazard bent above the body. As he straightened, after making an examination, he nodded. "Dead," he whispered. "It was foolhardy of Whitley to undertake this — but please note that——" His voice dropped even lower: "I'd forgotten the ex-pugilist, Reynolds. Best get him out of the way, if he has sufficiently recovered, eh?"

Dr. Reynolds turned. "My God!" his voice rang in the elder surgeon's ears. "Put that phial back on the desk—carefully!"

The others whirled, and to their horror saw that Blair Wilson, lurching heavily to his feet, had advanced to the desk and taken up the container of the antidote.

"Don't drop that, man! Place it back—no, hand it to me!"

Blair Wilson's features were twisted into a knowing leer. "Not so fast! Get back, or I'll smash this on the floor! Try any funny stuff and this hellish drug gets smeared from wall to wall!"

"But you don't understand——"

"The hell I don't! You doctor guys think you know it all; you figured I was just a poor dumb mutt, and maybe I am. But every dog has his day, and believe me this is mine!" He chuckled insanely, leering owlishly at the bewildered countenances of the three surgeons. "The doc, over there," indicating the still body of Dr. Whitley, "is having a hell of a time right now, and maybe I don't know it! Aw, you can't kid me, bozo," as Hazard would have spoken; "I know all about the doc's shot in the arm. You see, old chinwhiskers, there's one mistake the doc made in making his drug; it kills you, all right—deader than hell—*all but your brain!* You can't feel . . . . the doc stuck me with knives, and I guess I oughta know. You can't talk, cause your body's dead. But your brain ain't dead, not by a long shot. You can think . . . . and thinking and listening is all I been doing for about a million years! Maybe you doctors can explain that part of it—I don't know and I don't care—but you can sure hear, all right. Get back or I'll smash this bottle! There, we can talk now. Yeah, I gotta lot of talking to do. And while I'm talking I know the doc over there is suffering the torments of hell—for he don't know what I'm gonna do with his precious drug!" He laughed fiendishly, ghoulishly. "Maybe you guys think I'm crazy, and I guess I

am. I'm just crazy enough to send the doc down into the hell he had me in! Let me tell you, there ain't no torture in the world to compare with knowing that your body's dead —dead—dead . . . . and laying there, thinking and listening! It didn't bother me so bad at first; I could hear the doc talking to himself, and putting two and two together I figures out what he's aiming to do. I thought he'd bring me out of it right away . . . and then I heard him say he'd wait a few months . . . and then . . . I'd listen for his voice, listen for his footsteps. Listen; listen; always listening! 'Today's the day,' I'd tell myself; and then I'd hear the doc leaving me all alone again—alone with the demons of hell, of torment. I'd try to yell, try to make him hear me, try to move . . . . God! Then I'd realize that I was dead. That my heart wasn't beating. The horror of it! Just to lie there, a dead man, thinking and listening!

"Was it daytime or night? I didn't know. Only when the doc came I knew it was day—but it would be months and years before I heard him again. I could think of a million things happening to him: he'd been in an accident, got killed . . . . and there I was with a thousand million centuries ahead of me, centuries of thinking and listening, a dead man! You think I'm bughouse? I can tell you every word you guys said after you come in the office! It's a wonder I ain't plain nutty, after what I been through. . . . I promised myself that if I ever got back to life again I was gonna kill the doc; that's the only pleasant thing I had to think about. I figured out more ways of torturing and killing him than man ever thought of before. To hurt him, to tear him apart with my hands, to make his agony last as long as I could before I checked him out! God! how I was gonna laugh as he died!

"And now my time's come, only different than I figured. I heard the doc offer to take that shot himself; and I knew he meant to do it, to prove he wasn't faking. So I lays low, takes his money, and keeps my mouth shut until he passes out." The man's laughter rose shrilly into a crescendo of hate and horror. "Now I've got the whip-hand. I've got his drug . . . and there ain't no more of it, and there ain't no written directions how to make it! I'm gonna take this stuff with me, and if any of you guys tries to stop me, it goes smash on the floor! Maybe—maybe —I'll bring it back—some day!"

Terrified at the culmination of Dr. Whitley's weird experiment, yet daring not to move, daring not to attempt retrieval of the precious antidote, the three surgeons watched the ex-pugilist walk to the door and open it.

"From now on, the doc can do a little thinking and listening for himself. There ain't nothing gonna interrupt him!" And the crazed man chuckled at his own jibe. "He can do just what I did: he can listen—listen—listen for me to come back with his drug. Maybe I'll come—maybe I won't. *That is what the doc is gonna be worried about!*"

The door slammed behind him.

"No! Don't try to stop him!" old Dr. Hazard cried as the younger and more impulsive Truman would have gone in pursuit. "There isn't a chance of getting the phial from him without crushing it. The man is demented—he'd not have the slightest compunction in breaking the fragile container!"

"But, Doctor! Many things may happen; he may go completely insane, or get killed in a drunken brawl——"

"That, my son, rests upon the knees of the gods," said Hazard slowly.

"I can't—I can't chance it!" Truman burst forth. His face working with emotion, the younger man dashed into the hallway.

Dr. Hazard and Dr. Reynolds, drawn together by a mutual instinct, waited breathlessly. They heard a furious commotion; sounds of conflict, scuffling, a hoarse, enraged cry from the rasping throat of Blair Wilson. And then—a shivering, a tinkling of fragile glass upon the tiled floor!

Old Dr. Hazard clutched at Dr. Reynolds' arm as the bedraggled figure of young Truman re-entered the surgery. In Truman's eyes they saw a dreadful horror, a nameless dread.

"Broken!" said Truman in answer to the unspoken question. "My God!" And then, trembling, he added furiously: "There was a chance—and I had to take it! Now that the antidote is lost to us, there is but one thing we can do: we must, we must put poor Whitley out of his misery. My God! we can't permit him to go on through time suffering mental torment——"

"You forget," said Dr. Hazard, abjectly, "that nothing we can do will place Dr. Whitley beyond that which faces him . . . for we could but deprive him of life . . . and he is already dead!"

Truman gazed in open-eyed horror at the placid face of Dr. Whitley, as if seeking to discover some sign of understanding on that calm visage. But if Dr. Whitley heard, or knew, or understood, he gave no sign; not even the flicker of an eyelid betrayed the thoughts that must have seethed in his troubled brain. He was dead, truly, as far as any test could discover; yet he seemed to be intently listening—listening. . . .

Painted Dragons

By **CRISTEL HASTINGS**

Who knows what mirth lays bare your gilded fangs—
What secrets hide beneath the robe that hangs,
A background for your painted, grinning head?
No wonder all the little dreams have fled!

Who knows what thoughts light fires in your eyes,
While chow dogs howl their grievance to the skies—
And what becomes of tapers in the night
When only you and Buddha watch their light?

Who knows why streets are narrow, twisted things—
Is it because you drag your finny wings
In furtive places, prying here and there?—
And is that why you grin—and stare—and stare?

IN KASHLA'S GARDEN

A TALE OF HYPNOTISM

by Oscar Schisgall

"Black eyes! Terrible eyes! They blazed—they stung—they made him sway dizzily."

IN AMAZEMENT that verged on downright consternation, old Mr. Currie, the attorney, sank back in his chair and gaped at the agitated man opposite him.

"You—you mean to say," he demanded incredulously, "that your wife exerts a power as strong as that over you?"

"As strong as *that?* It's stronger! Oh, a thousand times stronger than you can possibly imagine!"

Trembling with the despair that filled him, Roger Byrd almost sobbed the words. His fists were fiercely clenched on the lawyer's desk, one of them continuously pounding as if to release compressed energy. Deep in his haggard eyes lurked the flames of unutterable anguish. He looked, in truth, as though he were battling to crush down explosive hysteria.

Uneasily Mr. Currie swallowed and wet his lips. He grumbled something indistinguishable; then, scowling, he muttered, "I—I never heard of anything so—uncanny——"

At that, Byrd leaned forward, while those brilliant eyes of his burned into the attorney's.

"You never heard of hypnotism?" he challenged, and his tones raced up the scale to a shrill, defiant pitch.

"Well, yes, of course; but not to such an astonishing extent. I thought—— Why, really, Byrd, this is quite beyond me!"

Profoundly bewildered, Mr. Currie brushed an unsteady hand up over his moist forehead and allowed it to sweep back across his pompadour of silken, unflecked whiteness. Staring at the man who had come to him with so extraordinary a problem, he encountered only an expression of impotent wretchedness.

He scratched his chin, nervously tapped the edge of the desk.

"Suppose," he suggested, "you tell me how you became the victim—ah—that is, how you were subjected to such an influence. I confess I'm totally confounded. If you want advice, you will have to explain more clearly——"

Roger Byrd rose—not as another man might rise for a recital, but with a sudden spring that caused his chair to fly back, tottering. His right fist delivered a final blow upon the desk. Then, glowering at the floor, he began striding about the lawyer's study.

He was still a young man, just venturing into his thirties; yet the lines which had of late been carved in his dark skin added at least a decade to his appearance. A quivering tenseness had beset his tall figure, so that under his gray suit every muscle seemed vibrant as he paced the room. He was troubled, moreover, by the disheveled condition of his black hair; time after time he was constrained to throw it back with an impatient jerk of his head—a gesture that merely emphasized the strain upon him.

"It started two years ago—in Calcutta——" he began.

"H'm, where you met your wife," murmured Mr. Currie, nodding.

"Yes. You know I was making a trip through India——"

"You had gone there, I remember," interrupted the lawyer, somewhat coldly, "to escape the scandal of that affair with the Royler woman."

Byrd whirled around to glare across the desk. A flood of scarlet rushed into the cheeks that had been pallid. He raised one hand impetuously but let it fall again after an instant of silence.

"Mr. Currie," he said, a strange harshness creeping into his tones, "I'll ask you to forget my past troubles—at this moment. I have enough to worry me without being reminded of—of other things!"

"I beg your pardon," said the attorney, but his shrug belied the earnestness of his apologetic inflection.

Byrd frowned. He looked down at the carpet, as though to recall the narrative he had momentarily abandoned. And then, resuming his nervous pacing, he continued without glancing at the lawyer.

"In Calcutta I met a friend—an American—who told me about the wonderful powers of Kashla. Mystic powers, he called them. She had a booth in the market place, where she entertained tourists by demonstrating her hypnotic ability—for a price, of course.

"I went to her. I went with that air of superior cynicism all travelers affect, ready to scoff at her trickery. I thought I should find an old hag, dirty and fawning.

"Well, my first surprize came when I saw Kashla. She was young and in a way beautiful. We chatted pleasantly; we laughed. You know how—how two young people can be. Naturally, I still disbelieved in her mystic power. And so she—she offered to prove to me what she could do."

Byrd paused. His fingers moved across his lips, shaking. For an instant he shut his eyes—although whether it was to conjure up or blot out some awful memory, the lawyer could not guess.

But the silence passed, and Roger Byrd proceeded, rather unsteadily and in staccato syllables:

"She made me sustain the gaze of her eyes. Black eyes, Mr. Currie! Terrible eyes! They blazed—they stung—they made me sway dizzily. I don't know what happened. All I know is that I regained consciousness two hours later—*and I was lying on my bed in my hotel!*"

The two men regarded each other across the desk, one gaping blankly, the other peering with savage intensity. Mr. Currie once more smoothed his white hair. Again he wet his lips.

When he spoke, it was in a queerly hushed way.

"You mean you were in a trance all that time?"

"Yes! I walked home in a trance! She controlled me from her booth—controlled me implicitly! Of course, I rushed back to her. I was filled with wonder and astonishment. But Kashla only laughed at my excitement. And do you know what she said?"

Mechanically Mr. Currie shook his head, his eyes wide, marveling.

"I remember her words distinctly—I shall *always* remember them!" whispered Roger Byrd. He had come to lean over the desk. Now his flushed features hovered directly over Mr. Currie's round face. He dropped word after word as though each were a stunning blow. "She said this: 'I have subjugated your mind and your will; henceforth, if I desire it, you are mine!' "

The attorney uttered an exclamation that dwindled into a grunt. "But that was nonsense!" he protested.

"Oh, was it?" cried Byrd, sneering. "Well, listen. I thought so, too. I ridiculed her. She told me that a mind once conquered remained hers—and offered to prove this new contention. She assured me that at 7 o'clock the following evening, regardless of what other plans I had made, I should be in her booth.

"It chanced that I had an engagement to dine with friends at that hour. I was not at all afraid of Kashla. In fact, I almost forgot her the next evening, and at 6:30 I arrived at the home of my dinner host. I distinctly recall hearing a servant announce the meal. I even recall starting toward the dining room while I chatted with an eminent Hindoo. Then——"

A puzzled expression leapt into Byrd's eyes.

"Then something happened. My mind suddenly went blank. What I did, or how, I can not say. But when my senses returned to me, it was precisely 7. And—there I stood, in Kashla's booth, blinking down at her while she laughed!"

Stirred, visibly affected, Mr. Currie reached for a cigar. He lit a match, thoughtfully held it until its flame scorched his fingertips, and cast it away without having puffed once. Keenly squinting up at Kashla's victim, he asked, "And she has never lost this power over you?"

"Never!" declared Byrd. "When she learned I was rich, that I had a fortune in America, she decided to marry me. *She* decided—you understand? I tried to run away from her. Indeed, I went as far as Bombay—when one day, while purchasing a steamship ticket, I suddenly lost consciousness. The next thing of which I was aware was being back in Calcutta, beside the laughing Kashla!"

Evidently the recital was plucking as severely upon Mr. Currie's nerves as upon his credulity. He rose, a thickset, stocky man with a loose double chin. Again he indulged in his habitual gesture of brushing back his white pompadour. Looking at Byrd sternly, he demanded, "Are you trying to tell me that you traveled from Bombay to Calcutta in a trance?"

Roger Byrd emitted a short laugh, a bitter, wrathful laugh.

"You don't believe it?" he snarled sardonically. "All right, let me go on. I did go to her in a trance. In that condition, I move as rationally, as safely, as though I were myself. The only difference is that I am controlled by *her* will, *her* mind, instead of by my own."

"But despite that, you married her——"

"What else could I do? She *willed* me to marry her!"

"Eh? She willed——?"

"Certainly!" snapped Byrd, relaunching his quick paces and com-

muning now with the floor rather than with the staring lawyer. "She compelled me to marry her—made me *want* to do it! Do you think that under normal circumstances I, Roger Byrd, who could marry any one of a dozen rich American girls, would have selected an Indian mystic from a Calcutta market place? Pah! Think, Mr. Currie, think!"

THROUGHOUT Byrd's agitated talk the attorney had been striving to compose himself, that he might consider this extraordinary situation sensibly, unemotionally. Now, eyeing his client, he saw matters more clearly. Roger Byrd had always been an impulsive creature of a sensitive and high-strung nature. That a hypnotist could dominate him was not so strange, after all, for his own will had been lamentably weak; since childhood it had been merely a weathervane pointing the direction of other people's desires.

Yet Byrd was ostensibly suffering, and the old attorney could not help scowling in concern.

"I understand," he said slowly, "that you wish me to find a way of obtaining a divorce for you or—or an annulment, if possible——"

"Yes! I'm—I'm sick of being mastered! She made me install her here in my home—and half my servants quit. So she imported servants from India. She redecorated many of the rooms so that I live in an Oriental museum rather than in a house. I'm tired of it, I tell you! Whatever she wishes, I am forced to do—*anything* at all. If I don't do it voluntarily, I do it under the spell of her will. I tell you, Mr. Currie, if I can't get rid of that woman, I may as well kill myself!"

"Oh, now—now," soothingly mumbled the lawyer, though he was frowning down at his desk in a manner far from reassuring. "I wouldn't talk like that, Byrd——"

"Because you haven't lived as I have for the past two years—an absolute mental slave! Why, I—I can't even run away! She makes me come back! Distance is no barrier——"

Of a sudden Roger Byrd sank into a chair. He bent far forward, sent his fingers writhing through his disheveled black hair. And in utter wretchedness he moaned, "I'd rather be dead than go on like this—without a will of my own!"

For a long time absolute stillness gripped the room. Mr. Currie moved to a window where, his hands clasped behind his back, he stood gazing out over a Westchester panorama of rolling fields sprinkled with colorful rooftops—the whole scene drenched in golden morning sunshine. Beneath his window his blue automobile waited to hasten him to his New York office.

Looking to the left, he could discern the white residence of Roger Byrd—an imposing house visible through a screen of poplars alined in military precision. It was less than a quarter of a mile away, a fact which had facilitated this early call.

But Mr. Currie was not pondering upon the things he saw. Instead, his thoughts were focused on the character of his despairing client.

The friendship he manifested toward Byrd was based upon an ancient family intimacy rather than on any personal esteem or respect. For Roger Byrd was scarcely the type to inspire admiration. In the past ten years he had been involved in half a dozen deplorable escapades with women—affairs that had cost him amazing sums; the last of them had sent him scurrying off to India, that he might escape the presence of an irate lady named Edwina Royler. That his flight had resulted in this tragic situation was perhaps unfortunate, yet it was possessed of a certain poetic justice which Mr. Currie was compelled to appreciate.

Suddenly his revery was shattered by Byrd's exclamation, "Well, what's to be done?"

The lawyer turned, fingering his heavy watch chain. Quietly he answered, "I—I don't know. This case is new in my experience, I must confess. I should like time to think—to consider——"

"Then, in heaven's name," cried Byrd, jumping up, "think fast! I've been suffering two years, and they've seemed to me two centuries!"

2

When, at a few minutes before 10, Roger Byrd returned to his home, he found his wife seated in her garden and smiling pleasantly at his approach.

It was a magnificent spot, this garden Kashla had caused to be planted in accordance with her Oriental taste. Fronting the white, pillared house of the Byrds, it was thronged with all manner of exquisite flowers, so that the senses not only reeled with the sweetness of its perfume but marveled at the splendor of a thousand brilliant hues.

An artificial brook crawled here and there, crossed at points by small, arched bridges that were canopied with vines. It had, indeed, become a show-place; and automobilists frequently stopped to stare at the glories Kashla had contrived to bring into her garden. Butterflies fluttered about incessantly, intoxicating themselves on the exotic wines the flowers yielded. In the surrounding trees birds of vivid plumage sang and chirped and pecked, as though they had agreed to select this point of beauty for their own domain.

Kashla sat in a wicker chair under a bower of rambling red roses, a neglected book lying open in the grass beside her. She was attired completely in flimsy white, and even Byrd could not deny her entrancing loveliness.

For Kashla was beautiful—beautiful in the maddening way only women of the East can achieve. Her hair, which was as lustrously black as the plumes of the crows that sometimes circled over her garden, was drawn down tightly over her ears and coiled in an immense bun on the back of her neck—so that she resembled, in her white dress, some ancient Grecian goddess.

She never availed herself of cosmetics; and her smooth skin, though tinted to an olive complexion, was always pale. But it was a queer pallor—an unhealthy, unnatural pallor. Often it made Byrd think of death——

In truth, Kashla was not a healthy woman. Frail, supple, small in stature; her mental strength had been developed at a lamentable sacrifice of her physical hardihood. So it was that she never indulged in anything which required exertion, her most taxing exercise being occasional walks about the garden. And she moved there with the ease and the languor of a phantom.

Like other frail women, she was addicted to tonics and medicines, many of which were compounded on Oriental prescriptions. But these in no manner affected her mental strength, and she governed her husband with all the energy of her fierce, fantastic power.

When he entered the garden, she summoned him with a slow wave of her white hand. Byrd went to her, frowning.

"You have been out on your morning walk?" she inquired amiably. Her voice, though throaty, contained all the flexible music of a clarinet. He nodded.

"And today?" she pressed on. "You have not forgotten, Roger, what you must do today?" In the past two years she had learned to speak English with astounding proficiency, though she still retained a

melodious accent that evoked delight from everyone save Byrd himself.

He glared down at his toe.

"Today," he said stiffly, "you want me to buy you the new town car."

"Ah, you remember! And you will leave soon?"

"Immediately."

He had not wished to purchase the new car that Kashla desired. Yet he comprehended the folly of protesting. If he did not comply with her requests willingly, he knew he would obey in a different way; and voluntary acquiescence was invariably preferable to being subjected to her weird influence.

"Then — go now, Roger," said Kashla, smiling at him and gesturing toward the house. Her flaming black eyes laughed up at him, as though mocking his helplessness. He bit his lip—bit until he felt a sharp pain. Then he muttered something and went into his house, preparatory to the unavoidable trip to the city.

So eager had he been to interview Mr. Currie at his home, that he had not paused to shave. And now Roger Byrd, passing through a corridor that reeked of Oriental incense and mounting a staircase whose wall was tapestried with the figures of snakes and dragons, entered the bathroom.

As thoughtfully, resentfully, he loosened his collar and drew off his shirt, he stared through the open window. The rattle of a lawn-mower rose through the warm stillness of the summer morning. Byrd looked down; there was Ozul, the Indian gardener Kashla had brought to tend her flowers. A bent, swarthy little man who seemed engrossed in no other worldly interest save his botanical duties. He was pushing the lawn-mower to and fro, to and fro—— Ozul the silent, the queer! The man who appeared sometimes to see and know everything and who seldom spoke of anything but flowers——

"What a crowd she's drawn me into!" actually rasped Byrd as he turned for his shaving brush.

Before him, just above the wash-bowl, was a marble shelf loaded with Kashla's medicines and tonics. He sneered at it; he hated those bottles as he hated everything symbolic of his wife.

One of the bottles was almost empty; it contained a brown fluid in which Kashla had been accustomed to place absolute faith. What it was, Byrd did not know. Some queer concoction brought out of India—one she took twice a day, at 9 in the morning and at 4 in the afternoon.

Peculiar stuff, he told himself while shaving. There was but a mouthful left in that bottle—only a single dose. Had she the prescription for another supply? But of course! Kashla had all her prescriptions. Her life depended on them, she had once confided to him.

What could be so potent in this tonic? He had never seen any of it in this country. It looked like iodine. Yes, iodine—iodine—iodi——

Of a sudden Roger Byrd stopped shaving. He stood rigid, his wide eyes gaping at his lathered reflection in the mirror.

It looked like iodine!

It has been said that men conceive a thousand vagrant fancies while shaving. How this particular idea ever struck Roger Byrd, he could not explain. It simply came to him, as if it were an inspiration.

A horrible thought it was. It stiffened every muscle in his tall body. Iodine——!

He began to think. Frantically, desperately, wildly, he considered the idea from every possible angle.

What if Mr. Currie *could* somehow have the marriage annulled? What if he *could* secure a divorce on some grounds? Would that terminate Kashla's power? No! She had promised to be the mistress of Byrd's mind

forever. And forever meant until death.

Until death! Death was the only thing that could sever the bond that linked his subjugated mind to her hypnotic power. Death——

Rivulets of perspiration oozed out of his forehead to stream down into the lather. Death—the tonic looked like iodine—there was iodine in the medicine chest—death—iodine——

Round and round, in a furious cycle, the thoughts whirled in his brain. People would say she had taken iodine by mistake; others had died by drinking from the wrong bottle. It was nothing novel. And so easy now! He could pour out that tonic and substitute an equal amount of iodine. Kashla would gulp it down in one swallow, as usual. And then——

The end of mental tyranny! The end of slavery, of torture! Freedom! Oh, great God, what an idea!

The lather was still on his face, but Roger Byrd had forgotten it. He was breathing rapidly, heavily, as he worked over those bottles. Whatever horror he may have experienced was overwhelmed by the mad exultation he derived from a vision of freedom. This was the only way, the only certainty, by which his mental shackles could be destroyed. And he leapt at it eagerly, unthinkingly.

When the tonic had been spilled into the wash-bowl, he allowed water from the faucet to gush out forcefully, that it might wash away all stains. Then he carefully—oh, so carefully—poured iodine into the medicine bottle——

It was done!

Roger Byrd stood quaking, yet oddly ecstatic. His eyes blazed. Perspiration coursed freely down his entire body. While he was in New York, purchasing a new town car, the thing would happen——

Consequences? He did not care about them or worry as to what might be his eventual explanation. Anything was better than a continuance of this fearful life.

The coroner would declare she had taken poison by mistake. What else could he say?

Oh, but yes, there *was* a danger! It occurred to Roger Byrd quite abruptly and left him frowning in bewilderment. Would not any investigator know that iodine had been poured into that tonic bottle? Would not any detective demand to know who had poured it, and why?

For several minutes Byrd contemplated this hitherto neglected peril. In his agitation, he had viewed only the ultimate escape from Kashla's power; now other things occurred to him.

But his mind was functioning with furious rapidity; in a moment he had developed a scheme which brought a shrewd smile to his lathered face.

He broke off the neck of the iodine bottle against the edge of the marble shelf.

Spilling the rest of its contents into the wash-bowl, he threw the remnants of the bottle into a metallic basket in a corner.

And now he had assured himself of a plausible alibi—one which would prevent anyone's accusing him of wilful or premeditated murder. For he could say to an inquirer: "Yes, I poured the iodine into that medicine bottle. Why? Well, when I reached for my razor, I inadvertently upset it. The bottle fell and broke at the neck. But a little iodine remained in its bottom. I saw that empty medicine bottle and poured it into that. Empty? Of course, the medicine bottle was empty!"

And who could oppose him in that contention, with Kashla dead? Who, indeed, would doubt him?

Roger Byrd actually grinned with the prospect of freedom from his

wife's power. Oh, he might be held for homicide; but with a clever, influential attorney like Mr. Currie, with so plausible an explanation of his unintentional act, with his family name, with the aura of an accidental catastrophe hovering over the whole business——

"Freedom!" muttered Roger Byrd.

And then, suddenly glancing through the window, he saw Ozul the gardener.

Ozul was still pushing the clattering lawn-mower, steeped in his task with bovine complacence. Yet Ozul *might* have been looking up through that open window——

"Nonsense!" Byrd assured himself. "He's been busy. He doesn't even know I'm here. There's nothing for me to worry about. Why, by tonight I'll—I'll be *free!* Free from her!"

And he shaved joyfully, confident that his apprehensions concerning Ozul were unfounded and insignificant.

3

JUBILANT in an unholy, demoniacal way, Roger Byrd motored into New York in his own yellow roadster. On the journey, he gloated. What splendid dreams were approaching realization! The death of tyranny!

He decided to follow his preconceived plans in passing the day, lest any deviation from his normal habits be construed as worthy of suspicion. Accordingly, he lunched at one of his clubs and tarried in a merry conversation with one of the other members. Over cigars and jolly anecdotes he sat until half-past 2. And he laughed often and heartily, though his merriment occasionally sounded queerly shrill, strained.

Then he occupied himself in the selection of a town car—a task that consumed most of the afternoon. It was 6 o'clock when finally he started homeward; and a flat tire delayed him another half-hour.

Finally, however, at almost 8 o'clock, Roger Byrd drove within sight of his imposing white residence.

As he neared it, his heart thundered, his whole being shook. How would he be greeted? By news of Kashla's death, of course. The servants would chatter in confusion, informing him that they had tried to telephone his clubs, but all attempts at locating him had been futile. Oh, he could visualize the calamitous scene, and it filled him with palpitant delight.

Twilight had settled on the country—a grayish, purplish twilight, strangely hazy. In the western skies flamed a few streaks of orange and yellow; their glow permeated the vagueness of oncoming night.

Byrd drove on, already conscious of the heavy perfumes emanating from Kashla's wondrous garden. He turned the car into the driveway, while every beat of his heart seemed a violent explosion. He was, he knew, on the very brink of—freedom! More than that, by this time he was *free.*

Toward the garage he directed the roadster. Perhaps twenty feet he rode into the grounds. And then, with an impulsive motion, he jammed on his brakes.

The car stopped with a jerk that sent him lurching forward. Very still he sat, gasping, aghast, dumfounded. He was staring toward that bower canopied with rambling red roses, where Kashla had been seated in the morning.

And as he stared, his forehead became dripping wet and every trace of color ebbed from his cheeks. A sense of abject hopelessness more insufferable than pain swept through him. It was the crash of dreams, the bursting of the bubbles he had blown.

For there, under the roses, smiling at him sweetly, sat the white-clad Kashla!

In the hazy light he saw her hand languidly rise to beckon him; and he went to her—dazedly.

"Have you bought the town car?" she asked when he stood before her. Mutely he nodded, his eyes round and stupefied.

"That is good," murmured Kashla, her fingers straying to wind about the stem of a dangling rose. "I see, my dear, dear husband, that you are surprized—no, shocked—because you find me still alive, eh?"

The taunt in her low tones tortured him. The perfume of the flowers made his senses ache with their load of sweetness. He was perspiring copiously now, and his hand unsteadily brushed across his moist forehead.

"Wh-what do you mean?" he demanded defiantly, his voice hoarse.

"Oh, why should we play innocent with each other, Roger?" Not once did her smile vanish. Over her fragile figure the purple twilight settled, like a mantle of unreality. She shrugged. "Ozul saw through the bathroom window."

"Ozul saw—!" gasped Byrd, terrified.

"Of course. He saw you toying with the bottles, so I was wise, my dear, and I did not take my tonic today. Ozul is very loyal to me, you know."

In his devastating chagrin, Roger Byrd could have shrieked. Instead of freedom he had encountered failure! But somehow he managed to restrain his wild impulses and stood motionless.

Kashla — the slender, ethereal Kashla—lavished her smile upon him.

"I can not altogether blame you, my good husband," she said, every word mocking him in that subtle, melodious way. "I have been very severe with you. But—when one tries to murder, one must suffer some punishment."

Trembling, Byrd attempted to exonerate himself by blurting, "It was an accident! I broke the bottle——"

"It was no accident," calmly answered Kashla. "And you will be punished. I shall tell you how, Roger. Mr. Currie, your lawyer, is waiting for you in the house."

"Mr. Currie——?" he repeated mechanically.

"Yes. Oh, he has already told me you wish to be rid of me."

Mentally Byrd cursed; what an idiot the attorney was for babbling things!

With all her mellifluous placidity, the slim Kashla went on, "I do not want to send you to prison. What use is a husband in prison? But I want your friend, Mr. Currie, to know what you have tried to do today. After that, I think he will not be so anxious to help you."

Byrd recoiled, stricken by fear. His eyes were round and ablaze.

"I can't tell him!" he cried.

"Oh, yes, you can—and you shall. Do not be afraid. He will not send you to prison. He thinks too much of your family. But—I want him to know what you did!"

"I can't tell him!" groaned Byrd.

"You shall."

"I can't! I—I——"

And then he encountered Kashla's suddenly narrowed eyes, twin specks of fire that burned their way into his very brain. He felt a dizziness surge over him. He swayed. He knew his will was under her dominion! and now she was exerting her fantastic power—sending him to confess to the lawyer——

Roger Byrd went.

He could not help going. He was completely governed by Kashla's will. His very thoughts were dictated by her desire. Like a creature in a dream he walked, entranced and impotent. And Kashla remained under the roses in her favorite bower, looking after him.

In the Orientally adorned drawing room Byrd found Mr. Currie and two other men. Who these were, he did not know; nor did he dare speak in their presence.

Yet words somehow gushed to his tongue—words he could not suppress—words sent there by Kashla.

He turned to Mr. Currie. It occurred to him that the attorney sat strangely pale and grave. Byrd bowed. In low tones that poured from him in a monody, he said, "Mr. Currie, today I tried to murder my wife. I substituted poison—iodine—for her tonic."

And as soon as he had uttered those words, Roger Byrd sensed a change well through him. The power that had been clutching his mind released its hold. He remained suddenly his own master, thinking clearly. But he quivered as he gaped at Mr. Currie; and he opened his mouth to a circle of astonishment.

For Mr. Currie, as well as the two other men, had sprung toward him. Now the lawyer was grasping his arm, shaking it violently. And in a choking voice he cried, "You—*you* did that, Byrd?"

Momentarily Byrd was frightened by the tremulous vehemence. Then, while a wan, helpless smile twisted his lips, he mumbled: "Ozul, the gardener, would have told you, anyway. She'd make him."

"But the gardener swore he knew nothing!" ejaculated Mr. Currie.

The confident assertion caused Byrd to frown. Had Kashla lied to him? He sucked in a sharp breath. What did Mr. Currie mean?

"My wife," he replied stiffly, "told me he knew *everything*."

Mr. Currie stepped backward and looked blankly at the other two men. Then he peered more intently at Byrd.

"Your wife said that?" he demanded. "When did she tell you that?"

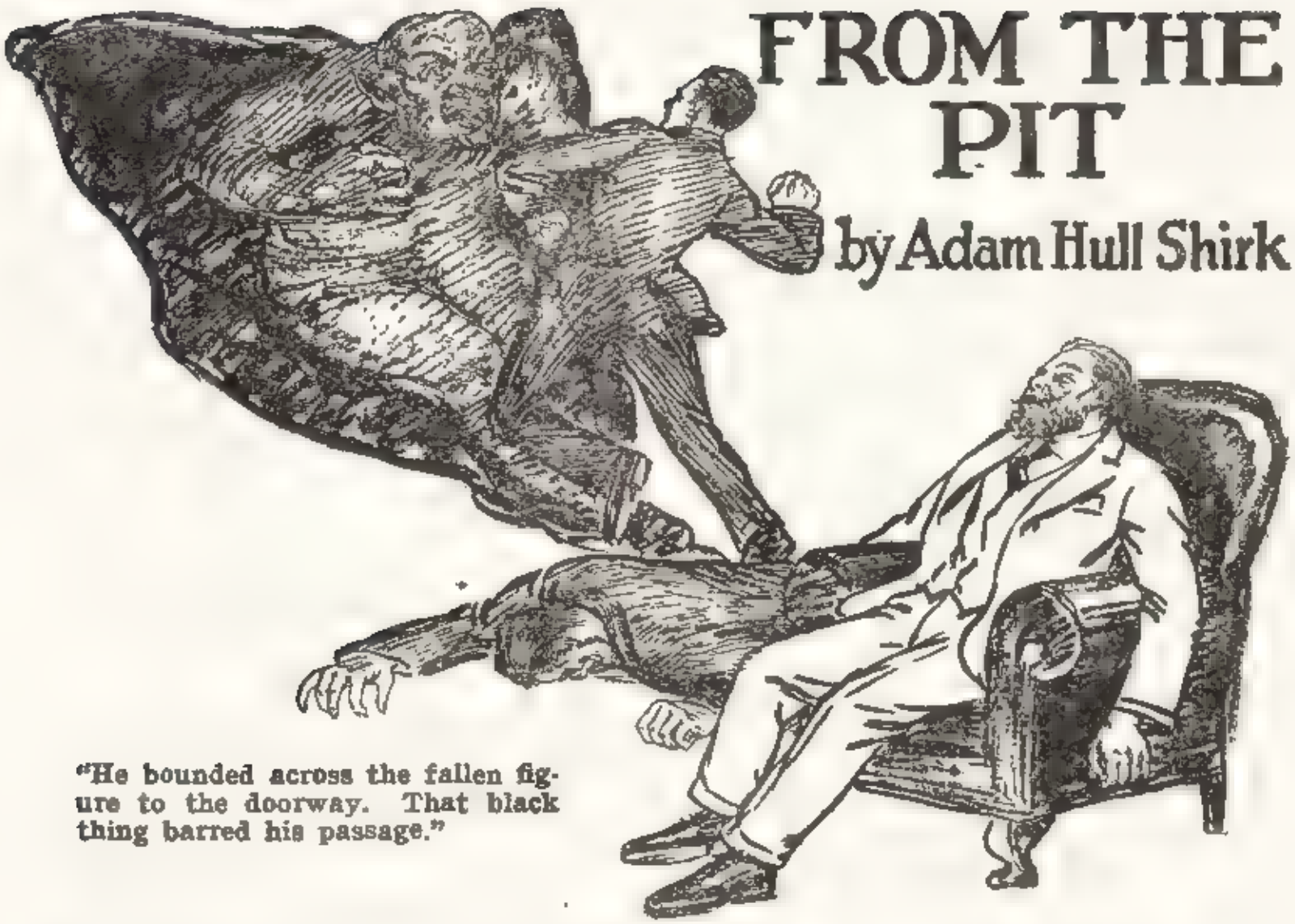
"Why, just a moment ago, in the garden."

Mr. Currie gulped, wet his lips. Slowly his two hands were lifted to grasp and shake Roger Byrd's shoulders.

"Are you crazy?" the lawyer whispered. "Your wife drank poison and died at half-past 4 this afternoon!"

FROM THE PIT

by Adam Hull Shirk



"He bounded across the fallen figure to the doorway. That black thing barred his passage."

THE note from my Uncle Carl did not imbue me with an excess of emotion despite its conciliatory, not to say appealing tone:

"My Dear Nephew:

"I need you at once and I hope you will forget any past differences and leave at the earliest possible moment. I enclose more than enough for expenses of trip. For God's sake come!"

The last sentence had been scribbled in pencil at the bottom of the typewritten communication and suggested an access of some emotion approaching fear. The address was new, for my uncle, Carl Brand, had always resided in Chicago, where his eminence as a surgeon was continually referred to in the press. Now, apparently, he had removed to Wychington, Illinois, which I ascertained by reference to the local railway office was some forty miles from the metropolis.

I considered whether to return the money or accede to his request. I recalled somewhat bitterly his coldness when, on the death of my dear mother, his own sister, a few years before, he had done no more than send formal condolences, though he knew we were in very straitened circumstances at the time. Again, a few months afterward, when I asked his assistance in obtaining a position in Chicago, he had advised me coldly enough to stay in Nevada. I had done so and by dint of hard work made myself a good berth with the Carson City Mercantile Trust Company. I thought it all over and finally came to a decision. After all, he was my only living relative. If he was in need, I could not refuse. So I obtained a leave of absence, packed a grip and took the train for Chicago. Arriving there, I found that a branch line stopped at Wy-

chington, arriving around 9 o'clock in the evening.

The station, when the slow traveling train at last set me down there, was lighted by a single electric bulb and was already closed. Luckily it was a warm, clear night in the spring, so that walking would be no hardship, and certainly it would be necessary to walk, for there were no conveyances in sight. I had not wired Uncle Carl of my coming; I did not anticipate any difficulty in finding so distinguished an individual in a town of three thousand population where, most likely, everyone knew his neighbor's business.

The town was visible in the early moonlight, in a little valley below the tracks and some hundreds of yards distant. A few lights were visible, but quite evidently this was a "9 o'clock" village and only a garage or drug store would probably still be open. It was in the latter, attended by a sleepy-eyed clerk, that I put my inquiry regarding the whereabouts of Dr. Brand. He looked at me in some surprize and answered my question, but asked one of his own at the same time.

"You're a stranger, aren't you? He's living over at the old Raynes place."

Further inquiry elicited the information that the old Raynes place was the dilapidated and formerly untenanted mansion at the fringe of woods on the other side of the town. It appeared that my relative had rented it, and partially repaired the damage it had sustained through the years of emptiness, some three months before.

The clerk vouchsafed one more bit of information as I left the store: "Better sing out before you ring the bell—he's kind of queer, you know."

I didn't know, but could well suspect it. However, I followed the advice and "sang out" after I had reached the dark doorway, following a difficult passage through a tangle of weeds and shrubbery to the veranda.

It was an old house, almost hidden by the encroaching woods; it was, furthermore, in a sad state of disrepair which was apparent even in the kindly moonlight. Evidently Uncle Carl's efforts to restore the place had not extended beyond its interior.

I stood before the door; not a light was visible, not a sound came from within. I called loudly: "Uncle Carl—this is Tom Rance—are you awake?"

Then I rang the bell.

My friend the clerk, however, had been quite sound in his advice, for even as the bell was jangling discordantly somewhere in the bowels of the old house, the door opened and a queer face peered out. I say "queer" advisedly. That it was my uncle's I had no doubt, but I had never seen him and was scarcely prepared for the vision. He was attired in a dressing gown of faded brown; his shock of white hair was leonine and unkempt; his face was gaunt, rugged and forbidding, while his frame, despite the indication that he was a man well past fifty, was still powerful.

"So you've come, have you?"

The greeting, in a deep, sonorous voice, was hardly what I might have expected, but I decided to take things as they came and answered affirmatively.

"You are my uncle?" I asked, somewhat superfluously.

He growled out a reply, also in the affirmative. "Come in," he added, and swung the door ajar, at the same time switching on a light that revealed a hallway with a worn carpet and the woodwork black with age and grime.

My uncle led me to the living room—a large apartment, furnished with a certain degree of comfort. He sank into an easy chair and nodded me to another. A center table, littered with books and papers, mingled with certain scientific instruments, occupied a considerable part of the space.

"You were already in bed?" I asked.

"No," he answered; "I had switched off the light and was dozing here in the dark. But I'll show you to your room presently. I suppose you are tired."

"Not especially. I'm anxious to know why you sent for me; why you're living here instead of in Chicago: are you all alone?"

"I am almost alone," he admitted. "My secretary, Miss Darling, comes here every day to take dictation. I brought her from Chicago. I have no relatives besides yourself. I came here to finish a—a work on which I am engaged."

"Oh, I see. And why——?"

"I sent for you," he continued, as if I had not interrupted, "because I believe I am in danger; I need a man I could trust. I hope I can trust you?"

The observation was almost interrogative and I smiled.

"I hope you can; I didn't bring any credentials," I said, "but my record is clean where I come from."

"Tut-tut," he retorted; "quick-tempered, like your mother. Well, it's all right. I haven't been particularly considerate, I know. Perhaps you will not regret coming, nevertheless—but we can go to bed now. In the morning I'll tell you all—all that you need to know."

His hesitancy, the hint of danger, of menace, rather stirred my somewhat sluggish imagination. Perhaps I should really enjoy this adventure after all. He said one thing more before showing me to the small but comfortable room where I was to sleep.

"I hope," he said, "you brought a revolver with you. Keep it handy, if you did. I sleep across the hall—if you hear anything, call; if you see anything—shoot first and ask questions afterward."

"But what——?"

"I can't tell you now—wait!"

He ambled off, and I heard the door close and a key turn in the lock. I was really tired, in spite of my disclaimer, and in ten minutes I was asleep—nor did anything disturb my rest until the sun breaking through the windows aroused me. I looked at my watch; it was 9 o'clock, and I dressed hastily, making my toilet in the adjoining bathroom. Then I descended the stairs, lured by a sound that was incongrous after the aspect of my uncle and his abode had become firmly established in my mind. It was the voice of a woman—singing!

The owner of the voice I encountered in the lower hallway as I rounded a turn, and both the song and the singer stopped abruptly.

"Oh," she said.

I was conscious of an aureole of golden curls, a piquant face and a trim figure in a light-colored dress.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "you must be Miss Darling; I am Tom Rance, Dr. Brand's nephew; I came last night."

This information I blurted out in a single sentence, hastily, lest I frighten away this vision of loveliness, like a butterfly in a barracks. The colors had departed from her face at the sudden encounter but flooded back again, rendering her far more lovely. She nodded in comprehension.

"My—Dr. Brand—told me you might come; I didn't know, of course—I am very happy to meet you."

She extended one dainty hand and I took it gratefully. Oh, yes, I de-

cided, this would be an interesting adventure! I may perhaps expose a somewhat precipitate nature when I admit that already at first sight I was half in love with this girl—I who had been heart-whole and proof against the sex during my twenty-five years of life. . . . She was exquisite—there is no other word—delicate yet not of the fragile type; her eyes were a cornflower blue, and sincerity and wholesomeness were evident in their clear glances. I wondered what her first name might be.

"Dr. Brand is in the dining room; he has just started breakfast; you can join him." She nodded toward the door.

"Do you mean to say that you cook for him?"

She laughed ripplingly: "Oh, yes; I'm cook and secretary all in one. I run over early and get breakfast, and before leaving in the evening I get dinner. We skip lunch," she added whimsically.

I could not fathom it! This delicately beautiful girl who would have been the cynosure of all eyes on Michigan Boulevard or Fifth Avenue, satisfied to live in this out-of-the-way hole and to cook and slave for this queer old uncle of mine. It was too much to understand all at once. Perhaps, I reflected, he paid her well—or possibly he had rendered her a great service which she was trying to repay. I remembered he was a doctor—and a famous one. Well, I should learn all later on. Meanwhile a healthy appetite lured me to the dining room where Uncle Carl was ensconced behind a paper. He laid it down as I entered and nodded grimly.

"All quiet last night," I ventured, after the good-mornings were said.

"I am afraid," he returned, rather caustically, "it would not have troubled you had the house been struck by lightning."

I laughed sheepishly. "I was more tired than I thought," I said in extenuation.

"After breakfast," he declared, "I'll tell you something more about my reason for bringing you here."

I ate for a space in silence. Finally I made another venture.

"I just met your secretary," I observed, quite casually. "Miss Darling, isn't it? She is charming."

He looked at me for a moment with a cold and calculating gaze. Then he nodded and grunted a single word: "Humph!"

After that I desisted and we devoted our attentions exclusively to the viands which had been placed there by Miss Darling, who did not put in an appearance, much to my disappointment. Evidently she dined alone in the kitchen, probably, I decided, of her own volition.

The meal completed, Uncle Carl led the way into the living room and motioned me to a seat as before.

"I'm not going to disguise the fact," he said, abruptly, once the door was closed, "that I am living in dread of an attack; and that I sent for you because I need a strong arm in case of danger."

"What kind of attack?" I asked with almost equal abruptness. I was thinking that he was rather careless in subjecting a delicate girl like Miss Darling to such a menace, and it made me cool toward him.

He hesitated a moment. "I can not tell you that—at present—except that I mean a physical danger—combined with a mental one."

"From a man, or men?"

"I—I don't know!"

"You don't know?" I echoed his words. "I don't understand."

"I don't expect you to do so," he retorted. "All I ask is that you aid in case of—the need arising."

"And Miss Darling?" I could not help asking.

"Is well able to take care of herself."

"You mean she knows?"

"As much as—you do."

"But not," I said, shrewdly, "as much as you know?"

He did not answer. In fact he sat listening intently, and although I followed his example I could detect no untoward sound; indeed the only sound was one that brought joy to my ears—the voice of the girl, singing again. I looked at my uncle's face for some softening, but there was not the slightest relaxation in the hard lines of his craggy features, which now, by daylight, were more rugged than in the artificial light of the night before.

"Well," I said, finally, "what do you want me to do, now I'm here? How long do you wish me to stay?"

"I want you to keep on the alert, always," he said, coming quite suddenly back to normal after the strained attitude of listening. "Have your gun handy; at night especially, I want you to help me keep watch. We will divide the time in equal parts and alternate. Tonight, for instance, you will retire at 9 o'clock and arise at 1. I will then retire."

"But I don't understand—watch for what?"

"For anything unusual that may occur. It may come in any form."

"What?"

"The danger. It may come at night; it may come in the broad daylight; it may come from within or from without. Or it may never come at all."

"Then how long do you wish me to stay?"

"Until it comes, or else until I learn by some other avenue that the danger is past. I can't explain, and if I did you wouldn't understand, Tom."

It was his first use of my given name, and somehow it warmed me toward him. I began even to feel a trace of pity for this strong man, this man with a record for high achievement in the world of science, hiding away here almost in the wilderness from a nameless dread. Then my thoughts went back to the girl.

"Who is Miss Darling?" I asked quite suddenly.

"Ah," he said, with a flicker of interest in his cold eyes. "You seem unduly interested in the young woman."

"How could I help being?—it is so odd, her being here at all and cooking—why, she could be——"

"How do you know what her motives or wishes may be?" he began almost angrily, but softened at once. "Listen, my boy," he went on, "I saved her mother once when she had been given up to die—by means of a simple operation. Five years longer she was able to keep her with her, and she has never forgotten. They were poor and I asked no fee. She would give her life, I believe, for me."

It was as I had suspected. Yet I could not get over the feeling that he was exacting rather heavy tribute now for a charitable deed in the past. However, it was too early to make decisions; later she would perhaps tell me herself. I let it go at that and recapitulated.

"Then," I said, "you want me simply as a bodyguard; I am to keep watch at certain times by night and all the time by day. And you will tell me when I am relieved."

"That's it," he agreed. "As to your work—I do not know under what circumstances you left, but I will say this—no matter what the outcome of this affair; no matter what happens to me—you will never have to work again unless you want to."

It was generous and fairly took my breath away. I could only say "thank you," but after a moment, I added: "Count on me, Uncle Carl. I think you will understand that my having come as I did proves I had no such expectations; I felt it my duty in spite of what——"

"Yes, yes, I know," he interrupted, hastily. "It is all right."

"Well, then," I insisted, "if I'm to be of any real help to you, give me some suggestion of what form this danger may assume—of what I shall look out for."

"I told you——" he began, but I would not be put off thus easily.

"I am no child," I exclaimed. "Tell me something at least—is it man or woman?—young or old ——?"

"It may be neither," he began, impressively. "I mean—there is something I can't explain. There may be one—there may be two—one I can deal with—the other—I don't know."

"Uncle Carl—what do you mean?"

But he only shook his head grimly, and turning, stalked abruptly out of the room. Was he mad? The thought flashed across my mind, but I rejected it when I remembered the girl. I went across and raised the shade from the window, which looked out upon a tangled mass of flowers and weeds, once a garden, now gone to seed. And among these disordered shrubs a form was moving—that of Miss Darling. I opened the sash with difficulty and the noise disturbed her. She looked up with a startled smile.

"Did you have a nice breakfast?" she asked.

"Heavenly," I replied. Instantly all thoughts of my uncle and his peculiar crotchet vanished from my mind. She was there, the morning was beautiful, the sun played in her hair and turned it to spun gold; the flowers became enchanted blossoms, the tangled garden a king's pleasance.

"Wait," I called, "I'm coming out."

I shut the window and hastened around to the door, and a moment later stood beside her awkwardly in what had become a shining field of Arcady.

"Miss Darling," I said, "please tell me your given name—somehow I feel that I simply must know it."

She laughed at me, white teeth and red lips forming a combination that was irresistible. Dimples played in cheeks that bloomed with health and youth; the soft wind caught the tendrils of her golden hair and blew them distractingly across her broad low forehead.

"My first name is—Vida."

"Vida Darling—what a wonderful combination!"

I must have betrayed my feelings, so close to the surface, for she flushed and turned to the flowers in which she was apparently working, trying to bring a bit of order from the chaos of neglect.

"Are you—happy to be here?" I could not help the question.

She looked at me again, seriously enough.

"I don't know," she said. "I owe him so much—and there are things I don't understand. Perhaps I'm not quite myself at times—I forget some things . . . . others I remember. Yes—I'm happy enough, and" —she hesitated and then smiled adorably—"I'm glad you've come—you are strong and you—you can help."

"But what is this danger?"

"I—I can't explain."

Always that phrase—both from my uncle and this girl: "I can't explain." Well, I told myself, I would do my best to find out what they had so much difficulty in explaining.

2

THREE weeks of what appeared to be senseless precautions preceded the events which culminated in the strange solution of the puzzle of my uncle and his beautiful secretary.

Between watching at night and by day, I still found ample opportunity of cultivating Vida Darling, and rather to my surprize I found that my uncle made no effort to discourage a growing intimacy which could lead but to one conclusion.

Exactly three weeks from the day when I first heard her singing, I asked Vida to become my wife—and she consented. I could hardly believe it myself. It was strange enough that so attractive a girl, who, it seemed to me, possessed all the virtues, could have gone on so long without having been captured by someone. Perhaps, I decided, she had lived a secluded life. I knew she was an orphan, had had a convent education and four years before had come to my uncle. Three years before that had occurred the operation on her mother which had restored Mrs. Darling to health. So, according to Uncle Carl's words, she had been an orphan for two years. She was, as she told me, twenty-five. Although about my age, she seemed much younger than I was. Perhaps it was her innocence, her sweetness, her general air of girlishness which kept her almost a child. My good fortune in winning her promise to become my wife was still dazzling my senses when the first untoward event occurred to mar what had become an idyl for me, even if it was a nightmare to my uncle.

It was the night of my late watch—that is, I went on duty at 1 o'clock and served till daylight. It was our custom to sit in the living room, with the door to the hallway wide open, thus commanding a view of the stairs leading to the bedrooms above. A fire in the grate made it cheerful in the big room with its littered and over-large center table. I kept my automatic at my elbow, with a dish of sandwiches flanking the weapon. Also there was a spirit lamp on which I could heat coffee to keep me awake. With plenty of books and papers, this had become quite a pleasant job, if monotonous. At times I wished something would happen to bring matters to a head. There were several reasons why I wanted to have it over and done with—not the least being that marriage between Vida and myself could hardly be considered until the trouble, whatever it might be, was at an end. Honestly, I don't think my uncle's promised financial reward for my services occurred to me. I would have been willing to go back to Nevada and work like a dog to keep Vida beside me and happy.

Some of these thoughts chased themselves through my mind that night as I sat in the living room trying to read but finding it increasingly difficult to keep my mind fixed on the printed page.

I wondered just how much Vida knew about the matter. She had told me nothing more, despite our compact and our love. If only the conventions would have permitted her to share some of those long hours with me, what a heaven it would have been! Just to have seen her sitting under the shaded glow of the reading lamp would have been the greatest joy I could conceive. Well, some day—soon, I hoped—this would come to pass—when she was my wife!

It was while this sweet dream was passing through my mind that I first heard that intermittent tapping, as of someone with a walking stick, coming slowly along a frosty road. But I doubted if it was caused by anything of the sort. It was so regular—almost like the drip of a faucet. Indeed, at first I believed that it was something of the kind; then I dis-

carded this idea, because the sound was coming nearer and nearer!

Tap-tap-tap!

Yes, it was nearer, almost at the porch, it seemed. Then it suddenly ceased, and the silence of the waning night was unbroken save for the distant crowing of a cock greeting the approaching day.

It was pitch-dark as yet; through the window, from which the curtain was drawn and the shade raised, I could see only the reflection of my own lamp and the room, of myself seated by the table; the odd optical illusion which everyone has noticed and which in times gone by suggested the famous "Dr. Pepper ghost illusion" which startled even the scientific world.

I strove to penetrate this, but without avail. It came to me uncomfortably that while exterior objects were invisible to me, I was plainly apparent to whoever or whatever might be without. I wished the shade had been drawn. But I made no move. If something were about to happen——

And at that moment came a guarded knock at the door!

I am afraid that my hair rose stiffly on my head; I know that a chill ran down my spine and that involuntarily I seized the butt of the revolver. Something in its solid coldness reassured me and I dropped down upon all fours, still holding the weapon. I did this to escape my position of high visibility through the window. Once beyond the range of the aperture, I rose to my feet and noiselessly crept into the hall. My uncle's orders had been to arouse him at the first sign of danger. But how could I do so without also alarming the visitor—whoever it might be? I decided to do my own investigating, for the time being at least. Any unusual sound, I knew, would bring Uncle Carl, always a light sleeper, down at once.

I reached the door, and with my revolver ready, the ancient chain fixed in position, opened it a crack.

"Who's there?" I whispered.

But the vision that confronted me in the darkness of the doorway, but slightly relieved by the radiance from the inner room, caused me hastily to detach the chain and swing the portal wide. Vida stood on the threshold!

Pale as a ghost she was, with an expression distorting her features that was utterly alien to them, an expression of diabolic hate, which gave place to fear and then faded as she fell forward, a dead weight, in my arms. As she did so I noted a long, dark rod or staff which she held clasped in one hand. This clattered to the floor. After all, it had been the tapping of this which I heard. I carried her to a chair. My uncle, aroused, was coming down the stairs and in a moment stood beside me. His eyes fell on the stick. He picked it up gingerly, looked at it for a moment and placed it carefully in a bookcase by the mantel.

"Vida," I whispered, "what is it?"

She was coming out of her faint and presently opened her eyes sleepily—and smiled! Then suddenly she sprang to her feet.

"Where am I?—oh, my God!—I ——"

She saw my uncle and then her eyes turned to mine again and the fear departed from them.

"I must have been sleep-walking."

Yet she was fully attired; perhaps she had dressed while in a somnambulistic condition.

"Don't you recall anything?" asked Uncle Carl.

She shook her head. "No. For a moment, when I first awoke, I thought I had a hideous memory, but it must have been a dream—it's all gone now."

"It is what I had dreaded," muttered my uncle, and then got the stick from its place.

"Tell me, Vida, do you remember this?"

He held it before her and she essayed to take it, but he drew it away.

"No," she answered, "what is it?"

"Nothing—I——" He paused. "You will have to stay here now, my dear. Mrs. Burns will probably never miss you at the house where you're staying. And it is nearly daylight. If people wish to talk—they'll have to talk, that's all!"

He replaced the stick and locked the door of the bookcase carefully.

Like one in a dream, I had listened to all this and failed utterly to make sense of it. What had the stick to do with it? Why had Vida come here? —in her sleep, if that was it—and why that concentrated hatred in her face when she first arrived? Was it for my uncle? for me? I dismissed both conjectures as absurd.

We spent the remaining hours of darkness together, Vida curled in the big armchair by the fire, sleeping peacefully as a child; my uncle and I, silently smoking and listening. But nothing more occurred and the sun's rays at last slanted through the windows and chased away the last vestige of the night.

VIDA, awakened by the sun, rubbed her eyes and sprang up. Memory returned quickly—memory of her experience only from the moment of her awakening in the room. All else had been blotted out.

"I'll get breakfast," she said, and vanished in the direction of the kitchen.

Uncle Carl said no more of the matter to her; but to me, while she was busy preparing the morning meal, he said, "I think matters are coming to a head."

"How?" I asked vacuously.

"This is the first genuine proof that he—that it might reach us, no matter what safeguards are established. The dread of this has weighed upon my shoulders for months—perhaps it is better that it has come to this."

"Uncle Carl," I said, "please tell me more—how can I help, if you keep me in complete ignorance?"

He looked kindly toward me; indeed, of late, I had begun to believe that his severe exterior covered a heart of gold.

"I—do not know what to say beyond what I've already told you of this menace. To explain all would take too long—and it may not become necessary. You love Vida, of course."

"Indeed, yes; I meant to speak to you; she has promised to marry me if all goes well; that's why I'm so anxious, too. I mean, in addition to my desire to serve you——"

He smiled at my impetuous, schoolboy speech.

"It is well. She loves you, I am sure. Well, if anything happens to me—shield her against anything that may occur. Do you promise?"

"I swear it," I responded fervently.

"Good. Now be on your guard—I have an intuition that tonight may be the crisis—there may be one, there may be two——"

With this enigmatical sentence, he turned away and left me standing, my mind filled with thoughts that I could not define even to my own satisfaction.

Breakfast over, we all three went into the living room. To keep her mind occupied as well as his own, Uncle Carl gave Vida some dictation on his text-book—a labor of years, evidently—and I went out in the yard and walked through the tangle of shrubbery, wondering what to do, arriving at no conclusion.

The day passed slowly and night fell. Vida had decided to defy the

conventions for the occasion, at the earnest desire of my uncle, who confided to us both his fears of some sort of attack that night.

"I would rather you were here—after what occurred last night—than that you should be absent. We must be ready—and together—when the blow falls."

Vida bowed her head in acknowledgment of the wisdom of his decision.

"You take the spare room," he said to her, "and Tom and I will watch here in the living room."

And this arrangement was carried out. At 10 o'clock, Vida went to her room and bade me a sweet good-night as we parted at the foot of the stairs.

"Remember, dear," I whispered, "that nothing shall harm you while I live to guard you against the world."

"I know," she breathed; "good night!"

I went back to Uncle Carl and we put out the lights at his suggestion.

"I want to draw their—his fire," he explained. "I want it over and done with at whatever cost."

As we sat in the darkness, I tried vainly to distinguish his features, but without any degree of success. He was simply a blur against the dark shadows of the room. I had my flashlight at my side, the pistol also was ready. Uncle Carl, too, was armed.

THE hours dragged by silently, measured by the ticking of the clock which pealed sonorously at the half-hourly intervals. It had just finished striking 12 when a sound broke the stillness—an unwonted sound as of someone or something stirring on the veranda without.

I felt rather than saw Uncle Carl move slightly, tensing his muscles, as did I, so I knew he had heard it, too. But neither of us spoke.

It came again, that furtive, slithering sound; one could hardly call it the sound of footsteps.

And then came a sudden gust of wind—I had not before noticed that it was blowing—the hall door, the main entrance, was open. And then I knew that, purposely no doubt, Uncle Carl had left it unlocked.

"Get ready," he breathed.

Something was coming into the hallway—I felt again that inrush of air, and it seemed like the wind off a desert, hot and uncanny. And then the darkness of the doorway to the living room was rendered even darker by a black something that filled it.

"Lights!" called Uncle Carl.

I snapped on the flashlight, directing its rays toward the door; at the same instant he switched on the room lights.

What I saw I find difficult to describe, even now, after the passage of years. A man stood in the entrance, wrapped in a black cloak. He was tall and spare. His cloak muffled all but the eyes—eyes that seemed to emit a radiance of their own, like twin streaks of green fire. And behind him loomed another shape, grotesque, dark, heavy and clumsy. It seemed somehow impalpable, so much so that then, as now, I could not determine whether it was shadow or substance. Yet it moved, I swear, separately and apart from the other figure. And I was conscious of a fetid odor, of that warm, sickening air.

"Where is she?" A dull, inhuman voice boomed from the first figure.

"Where you will never get her, you devil," screamed my uncle, and at the same instant he fired.

I followed suit as the figure lurched into the room toward him. The thing in the background seemed to grow and envelop us all for an instant but my uncle screamed to me wildly: "Tom, Tom—come beside me—here."

He was muttering some incoherent words, like an incantation, as I took up my stand beside him; and then the cloaked figure—seemingly unhurt by our fire—was upon us. The other intruder, as my uncle continued speaking in what seemed a foreign tongue, receded until it crouched, a black blur at the entrance to the room. The first figure, obviously human, whatever its companion might be, seized Uncle Carl, and as the cloak slipped from the face I saw a hideous countenance, seared as with fire, almost featureless, but cruel as hell. It wound long arms about my uncle, who seemed to have become suddenly a helpless prey to the onslaught. He seemed exhausted as by some tremendous mental effort. Not so, however, was I affected. I pumped my automatic, and as I did so was conscious of a woman's scream. Vida!

At last my shots had taken effect. The creature with the face of horror reeled and relaxed its clutch, and Uncle Carl, released from the hold, slipped into a chair, unconscious. The figure fell in a heap and I bounded across it toward the doorway. I could hear Vida's screams, and that black thing barred my passage. I can not describe it; perhaps there are no words in our vocabulary that are equal to the task.

I heard Uncle Carl, roused from his momentary stupor, call out: "Wait, Tom, wait!"

I paused for an instant, and again I heard him repeating that formula of words which now sounded like Latin phrases, but none that were familiar to me. And as I live, before me that dark, unclean thing receded, dwindled, vanished! The strange odor, the hot breath, vanished with it and in a moment I had passed into the hall, and Vida, crumpled in a heap at the foot of the stairs, was held tightly in my arms. Thank God, she was alive.

I turned and saw my uncle stooping over the man on the floor.

He rose from his position with a look of such relief on his face that I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

"It's over," he said. "He's dead. Take Vida into the dining room—there's nothing to fear now—and come back here."

I did his bidding. The girl was again unconscious, but breathing regularly. I placed her on a couch, which incongruously stood in the dining room, and covered her over carefully, for she was in her nightdress. I turned the lights full on, closed the door, and came back to the living room.

UNCLE CARL was standing looking down at the huddled form on the floor. He looked up at my approach and motioned me to come nearer.

"There lies the greatest fiend that the present century has produced," he said. "He is dead. I do not know which of us killed him. But in any case, I will shoulder all the blame."

"There can be no blame," I interposed, "for they came like thieves in the night—it was our right to defend our property and our lives against marauders."

"Right," he admitted. "You say 'they'!" He paused and looked keenly into my face. "You, too, saw—the other?"

"The other man?"

"It was no *man*," he replied; "it was nothing for which we have an accurate name. It no longer exists—it was what I can only describe as a 'familiar'."

I shook my head. The term was one with which I had no acquaintance.

"It is a long story and you shall have it all now," he went on. "But first, we must dispose of this body—and in the morning we will see the authorities. How is Vida?"

"She seems in a trance."

"That exactly describes her condition," said my uncle. "I can revive her—perhaps I had better do that now, so that she, too, may hear all the story, of which now she knows only a part."

I followed him into the dining room to where my darling lay covered by a spread, looking angelically beautiful. Her bosom rose and fell rhythmically in what was apparently natural slumber, but I knew she was in a still deeper sleep than that induced by nature. Uncle Carl rummaged in the sideboard and brought out a bottle of ammonia.

"This will sometimes arouse the subject of a hypnotic trance," he said.

"It—she is hypnotized?"

"Yes—the devil's weapon. But the hypnotist is dead. Sometimes only the one inducing the trance can restore the patient or subject, but I think I shall succeed without him—I must do so."

He bent over the girl and spoke to her.

"Vida," he said, "awake."

He held the bottle of ammonia close to her nostrils, and then quickly handing it to me, clapped his hands loudly. To my joy, I saw the color rise in her pale cheeks, and her breast was convulsed with some untoward effort; suddenly she sat up and looked wildly about her—into my face and into Uncle Carl's. Then she burst into an uncontrollable fit of weeping.

"Thank God!" breathed my uncle, and I echoed his words. In a moment I had gathered her, spread and all, in my arms, and she wept unrestrainedly on my shoulder.

Presently she ceased, and realizing for the first time the scantiness of her attire, drew away with a little cry.

"Tom—Dr. Carl—what has happened? I don't remember——"

"All is well," said my uncle. "He is dead."

"Dead! Where?"

"In the living room. Wait here, my dear, till Tom and I remove the body, and then we will have a talk. Or better, run upstairs and dress—by that time there will be nothing to disturb you in—the other room."

I took her to the door of her room and came hastily downstairs to where my uncle had already partly composed the limbs of the dead man and thrown the cloak over the evil face, evil in death as in life. Together we lifted the body and carried it into a disused room where we laid it decently on an old cot bed. Then we came back to the living room.

Vida called that she was ready and I went up and brought her down.

Then, the lights full on, the fire going, we heard from the lips of Uncle Carl the story which to this day is as strange in the telling as it is difficult to believe. But I saw—there can be no doubt!

"SEVEN years ago," he began, "I was in active practise in Chicago, but already I had begun to specialize almost exclusively upon diseases of the brain. Unlike some of my more hidebound confrères, I gave a great deal of attention to psychology, psycho-analysis (though the phrase was then unused, if it was known) and metaphysics. I believed firmly that somewhere there was a connection between that impalpable thing we call the soul and the material organism called brain, that somewhere between matter and mind lay the solution of our vexatious problems. Thus I became intimate with the man who lies dead in there—whose name I shall withhold, at present. He was a brilliant scholar, but his *métier* lay along the lines of suggestive therapeutics to even a greater degree than did mine. Hypnosis was his hobby, and he had developed it to a degree far beyond that of any of our modern opera-

tors. And he was, at heart, a devil.

"He was older than I. I knew nothing of his family, of his home life. That he was unmarried, I learned by some chance remark he made—that was all. I did not even know where he lived. But we had long discussions in either my office or his, which he frequented at irregular intervals, sometimes sitting far into the night, arguing, speculating, sometimes quarreling. He claimed that good and evil were relative terms and that moral qualities were merely the inventions of man—having no bearing on the deeper things of life. I maintained that somewhere in that mysterious organism called brain lay the controlling element that had to do with the traits of good and evil. I believed that some day I or someone else would discover the means of reaching this element, and perhaps by a psychiatric operation removing entirely the tendency to do or even think evil. He laughed at this theory. 'It is all a matter outside the brain,' he asserted, 'and I have delved into studies that will give me the ability, I hope, to control the powers of evil as one controls a horse by means of the reins and bit.'

"One night, about seven years ago, when I had already known this man for some little time, I was aroused by a ring at my doorbell. My name was on the door-plate, but I seldom had patients at home or was called on a case out of hours. Being unmarried, alone, I had not even a servant then, so I answered the door myself. On the step stood Vida."

He paused and looked toward the girl, who nodded slowly, flushing at the remembrance.

"She told me her mother was ill and begged me to come. The house was only a few blocks distant. I accompanied her, and on the way she explained that she was home temporarily from the convent and that her mother had had an 'accident.' When I saw the poor woman, I knew that the accident was in reality nothing short of a brutal attack. I restored Mrs. Darling to consciousness, and then I demanded to know the cause of the injury—she had apparently been beaten. Both she and Vida refused at first to tell—and then, at my insistence, admitted that a man had been responsible. This man lies dead in that other room. He was the brother of Mrs. Darling—Vida's uncle.

"But the shock came when I learned the name of the devil who had thus attacked a defenseless woman simply because she begged him to desist in some practise that was becoming abhorrent to her—he lived with the mother and daughter—it was the name of my erstwhile friend and fellow investigator.

"Mrs. Darling was more seriously injured than I at first suspected, but I performed a very slight operation which saved her life.

"The gratitude of both mother and child was affecting, and we became devoted friends. I can say—now that she is no more—how deeply I learned to love Vida's mother. She was the image, in a matured way, of her daughter. And she was in every respect a wonderful woman. But I could not conceive of myself as married—I was already wedded to science. Furthermore I was considerably older than she.

"I called the brother to account the next day and told him frankly what I thought of him. He laughed like a fiend. But he heeded my warning and for a long time did not molest his sister again. Vida came to work with me as my secretary after a year or so. She has been like a daughter ever since.

"And then one day, about two years ago, that devil again attacked his sister, and from the effects of this injury she did not recover. How-

ever, a charge of murder could not be placed against him. The actual physical hurts did not directly induce death. It was the mental cruelty and the horror of the man and his practises which resulted in her gradual fading away. Thus he was in every sense morally to blame. Why did I not denounce him? His sister begged me not to do so, as did Vida. And I acceded to their wishes. Then she—died."

For an instant my uncle bent his head, and Vida's eyes were suffused with tears. I reached over and put an arm about her as he resumed.

"I forgot everything then but my grief. I knew that I should have sacrificed all for my love, and now it was too late. Then came the thought of revenge. He should pay!

"No matter by what means I induced him to come to my office again in a friendly way, following the trouble and my accusations which had estranged us. I had learned things about him, meanwhile, from both women—from Vida and, before her death, from Mrs. Darling—things which were too unsavory, too horrible—yes, too transcendently terrible—to accept. He dabbled in forbidden things, and made incursions into a realm of which you can have no cognizance. The women knew only that he performed strange experiments in his laboratory and that they found dumb creatures, a black cockerel and a he-goat, which had been killed in a revolting manner. Once, they found the pentagram, with mystic symbols, sketched in chalk on the floor of his study. Always there was an indefinable, an evil odor, in his rooms. They heard him talking to himself at night—but it sounded as if he were addressing another. Once there were heavy sounds as of some altercation in which things were overturned. He had cried out, and to their questions answered only that he had knocked over a table and hurt his foot. Sometimes there was a trace of unusual heat in the rooms.

"My meetings with Mrs. Darling had been invariably at my office, where Vida was working. Oddly, her uncle had made no effort to prevent her working with me. Perhaps he was glad to be rid of her that he might carry on his experiments the more safely.

"As I say, I induced him to come to see me at my office on several occasions, and one evening shortly after his victim had passed on, we talked later than usual. I was prepared, for I too had been pursuing my studies assiduously. I drugged the wine he drank, and when he was unconscious, administered an anesthetic. I placed him on my operating table and prepared him for an operation. The brain! That was the seat of the trouble. If I could remove that evil tendency by the knife I might make him a worthy member of society, even a valuable one. Also I would prove my theory. And if I failed—well, he deserved death!

"The operation was a success—in so far that he recovered rapidly under my careful nursing. I had removed a tiny particle of the organic matter that constituted what I believed to be the seat of the emotion of evil. But I had made an error. Instead, I had removed the part which contained whatever small amount of good tendency was resident in his brain. In a word, I had constituted him a human monster a hundred times worse than before. For in the worst of us there is always some slight inclination to good; in him there now remained no redeeming feature. I began to note the effect as he recovered strength following the terrific shock of the operation, slight as it had been in some respects. He knew me, but not as in the past. He had forgotten my significance in the scheme of things,

he had forgotten his sister and Vida. He had forgotten everything but that certain faces were familiar—as mine. But he was now a cruel animal. He caught the cat I kept in my office, and had I not stopped him in time would have dismembered it in sheer cruelty. He was a monster!

"I let him go. God forgive me, I let loose this hideous thing upon humanity, believing it would soon destroy itself. For a long time it disappeared and I believed that the monster was dead. Then I received a letter from—him!

"He had recovered his memory—but his evil nature was still supreme. He knew instinctively what had happened because I had often aired my theories to him. And he wished only to wreak vengeance on me. Not, he carefully explained, because he regretted losing the slight remnant of good that had remained in his consciousness but because I had tricked him and employed him as a subject for my experiment! He meant to kill me and—Vida! He bade me beware of his powers, of his hypnotic strength, by which even at a distance he could control his victims. He proved this—as you have recently had cause to know—when he subjected Vida to his will, sending her with that stick to—kill! For the stick contains a wicked blade which only a spring in the handle releases. You had not discovered it. And that blade is steeped in deadly virus. But he reckoned without Vida's essential goodness. He could not compel her hypnotically to commit a crime, for it was not in her nature to do so.

"He failed in his attempt. . . . but I am ahead of my story. For months he pursued us with threatening letters. For myself I cared little, but I dreaded what might come to Vida. For latterly, the letters conveyed the suggestion that she would be the one to suffer and that through her he would reach me. But as yet the manifestations, if I may so describe them, were witnessed, or felt, by me only. At night I would awake to feel a hot breath in my face; to detect a fetid odor too horrible to be endured; to become aware of something that mopped and mowed in the shadows of the room. It came, I know, like that thing tonight, from the abyss itself—from the very pits of hell! It was wearing me down even as I told myself it could not be so. At least, it was the quintessence of hate, focused upon us, and against this hideous thing even my science was helpless.

"You know now why I could not explain, Tom. You would have thought me mad! But you saw—you saw for yourself, tonight. That awful shape which shrank and vanished before the words I spoke, a formula learned at the cost of diligent research in the ancient volumes known to but few living men, remembered—thank heaven!—tonight in time to save us all. By certain incantations, creatures from that netherworld may be summoned forth, I verily believe. And by opposing words they may be driven back whence they came. You may say it was all hypnotism—that we saw only as the audiences of Hindoo fakers see their marvelous feats, such as the fabled rope trick—but I know better.

"We came here to escape, a few months ago. It was the last stand in this unequal fight, literally good against evil. I could not touch him with the law—I waited for him to come that I might kill him and by the words I had learned, drive his evil companion back to the abyss. Then I sent for you—I needed a strong arm. Vida needed more than my frail protection—Vida who knew only that the creature once known as her uncle had become an implacable enemy.

"And, as I had hoped, on the failure of his hypnotic effort to influence

Vida to slay me (for I assume he did not know of your presence here, Tom), he determined to come himself —accompanied by the dread thing— to achieve his purpose. The rest you know."

YEARS have passed. Vida and I have long been happily married and my uncle is dead. He never again spoke of his theory regarding good and evil and the possibility of a material operation on the brain controlling these qualities. Indeed, he retired from all active practise or even experiment following the downfall of his enemy.

Vida and I try to believe it was all a case of hypnosis developed to the nth degree. The other thing, in spite of what I saw, we can not accept. Sufficient unto their time the foul practises of those remote sorcerers of which, perchance, the man I saw slain was an unholy revenant. Steeped in blood, made hideous by sacrifices of diabolic cruelty, wrapped in the smoke from laurel, cypress and alder, protected by the magic circle of evocation and with altars crowned with asphodel and vervain, they worked their spells mayhap in the dim and shadowy past. Today they have no place, and I, for one, refuse to accept, in this respect, even the evidence of my own senses.

MEMORIES

By A. LESLIE

Out of the shuddering past they come,
Croaking with ghastly mirth,
And the dry wind flutters in rags o' shroud
From the graves that gave them birth—
(Oh the white of the stars and moon tonight
Is the ash of bleached-out bones)—
And they mutter and gibber of this and that
In noseless and toothy tones:
Raw red gold—raw red of lust—
Shards of a shattered shrine;
Shadows of stars on an upturned face:
God! and that face was mine!
Shadow shapes in the empty dark;
Grim things that I may not tell;
And a woman's lips stained scarlet
With the bloody wine of hell!

A Tale of Astral Vengeance

The Black Castle

By MARC R. SCHORER *and* AUGUST W. DERLETH

THE black castle high up on the cliff stood solitary and lone, silhouetted against the moon. By day the castle was prominent, but by night, in the full moonlight, it was much more so. It stood in relief; there were no trees, only a few shrubs that grew along the irregular sides of the mountain. To the fore the cliff was sheer, and, topping this declivity, the ominous structure looked malefically down upon the little village of Cheveaux. The village was completely enveloped in shadow, for the moon had not yet risen to a sufficient height to diminish the broad shadow of the mountain. Every soul in the peaceful village was in repose under the pleasing mantle of darkness upon it. The village was like a picture by an artist: all in darkness save a few thin wisps of smoke spiraling from several chimneys and rising until they were caught in the light of the moon streaming down upon the plain from above the castle, then dispersing and vanishing into the crisp air.

In sharp contrast to the calm of the exterior a grim drama was being enacted within the castle. In a large room in one of the turrets of the château the aged Count de Cheveaux sat at a ponderous oaken table. The moon cast a patch of light upon the floor, which, aided by the flickering gleam of the flambeaux in their brackets on the table and the fitful light from the flames of the fire in the grate, served to light up a portion of the room.

The room was almost bare. The walls, save for a coat-of-arms above the fireplace and a faded portrait of an ancient ancestor of the de Cheveaux exactly opposite it, were devoid of ornamentation. The painted figure in the portrait gazed with great dignity at the coat-of-arms as if in approval. The floor likewise was bare of decoration. A few cumbersome chairs situated at the two entrances of the chamber gave the room an atmosphere of heaviness, of gloom. The firelight played upon a great skin stretched out upon the stone floor before the grate, and the gleaming teeth in the head of the pelt shone malevolently. The sputtering flambeaux on the table disclosed the count's pale features and made evident the extreme agitation that held him in its grasp. His face twitched oddly and his hands trembled; he looked as if he were suffering from the palsy. He was writing, but not of his own volition, for his hand moved steadily and unhesitatingly across the parchment upon the table, while his glaring eyes were fixed with fierce intensity upon the lines of writing. There were no sounds in the room save the crackling of the flames in the grate, the scratching of the pen upon the parchment, and the occasional eery sputtering of the flambeaux.

Suddenly the hand quavered and ceased its motion; and the count seized the opportunity to re-read what had been written. His throat became dry and a violent trembling

shook his body as he read the lines his hand had written:

"Monsieur, I am here. I, Armand Champoy. I have come to speak to you tonight through my sole medium, your pen and hand. Does Monsieur remember me? My astral self gazes complacently down upon you. Perhaps, if Monsieur can not recall my name, he can bring to mind an incident of twelve months ago when he so calmly compelled me to dispose of my material self to favor his fortunes? Ah, Monsieur does, I perceive by his agitation! My widow suffers from the cold, Monsieur; my children starve, and I am helpless here. But you, ah, Monsieur, you cower about your fire in company of that simple-minded son of yours. Ah, Monsieur, you *live* life. But then, I have nought to complain about; I am free and can taste no ills: it is because of my mortal widow and my suffering children, Monsieur, that I complain.

"I can not help them, Monsieur. But—I can avenge the wrongs you have done them. The wrongs, Monsieur, that you have done for gold. I can avenge innumerable sins committed for the sake of your fortunes. Does it seem foolish to you, Monsieur, that I should be writing this? That I, an astral, should threaten vengeance? But it should not, for those black blots, those books on sorcery on your shelves have taught you overmuch. Yet you may wonder how I can avenge the wrongs you have done, Monsieur, and I shall tell you."

The hand started to move again and the count followed his pen with his eyes.

"It is simple, Monsieur, so simple. A rare experiment, Monsieur. Simply this: For a twelvemonth I have been gathering knowledge upon varied subjects, and my field is unbounded. Your son, Monsieur, has been a resident of this gloomy castle since he can remember, and his brain is crude and his soul is unrefined. But I, Monsieur, I am strong; my mind excels in all, Monsieur, but I have no body, and also, Monsieur, I seek revenge. My abode is here, here by your side, Monsieur. My solution is this. Day by day, night by night, I will cast my superior power against your son's feeble will.. I will drive out his astral body, his soul, Monsieur, and I will enter and possess his body. Then, Monsieur, I will kill you, brutally, unhesitatingly, as you deserve."

The writing ceased, and the count could move his hand at his will. He stared at the mute evidence of the astral. Suddenly he rose, and with an angry snarl he cast the parchment from him into the hungry flames in the grate. He rubbed his hands across his eyes, futilely endeavoring to blot out the words that danced maliciously before him. He clasped his fists and glared angrily into the fire. Slowly he turned, walked toward the main corridor of the castle, and was swallowed up in the thick darkness.

It was two weeks later. The young Count de Cheveaux had acted strangely that day. His father had noticed this, and it impressed him. He pondered long upon it as he sat alone in his chamber. The more he tried not to think of the parchment which he had so vehemently thrown from him two weeks ago, the more he thought of it and associated it with his son's strange behavior. The astral of that Champoy was getting in its fine work, mused de Cheveaux. He could see no way to stop it; for once in his life the Count de Cheveaux was helpless. The thought unnerved him.

One day, some time later, the elder count observed his son watching him covertly through half-closed eyes. He thought at once of Armand Champoy. His son was twirling a heavy walking stick and he had been staring at his parent out of the corners of his eyes. The elder count frowned heavily at his son, but the latter seemed not to notice. However, he removed his gaze and placidly continued to twirl his cane. The incident bothered the count not a little, and soon he went to his library to consult his store of books on the black arts.

The winter slipped by and spring came. The village of Cheveaux was busy as a hive of bees. From the

other side of the mountain towering above the village came the rushing, roaring sound of a great waterfall as it tumbled down the mountainside from crag to crag, from ledge to ledge, until it struck the plain with a great noise and went rushing off to water the fertile fields of the peasants. The birds were nesting, and the early spring flowers were beginning to force their way up through last year's leaves. The snowbanks were almost all gone; only here and there on the sides of the mountain a few were visible, and they too were fast melting under the warm rays of the April sun.

But inside the castle all was not so calm. The old count was pacing to and fro in his library. He was uneasy, and he had good cause to be so, for his books of black magic could not aid him in the predicament in which he now found himself.

A week ago his son had been taken ill. This was after a gradual decline. His illness could not be diagnosed; it seemed as if the patient was overcome by weariness, although he had never exerted himself to any harmful extent. For some time he lay in a coma, then suddenly he emerged and manifested a wish to rise. He had done so, healthier in mind and in body. At any other time it would have been a perfectly natural occurrence, but now the aged count thought continually of Armand Champoy and his threat. His son did not seem the same to him. His actions were so strange, so alien, so utterly foreign to his nature.

The elder Count de Cheveaux was very perturbed over an incident that had occurred during the day. His son had removed a long-bladed stiletto from its rack in the library and had taken it to his chamber. The count knew, because he had watched him, had stealthily followed the youth and observed his every action.

That night a storm broke over the castle, shattering the placidity of the little village of Cheveaux, and for the first time the elements were in agreement with the life within the castle.

The aged count's mind was in a turmoil, but one thought stood out above the agitated throng—his son was about to kill him; of that he was sure. That Champoy had succeeded in his evil purpose of possessing the body of his son during his recent illness. And he was brooding, brooding on the dreadful course that presented itself to him as his only alternative.

At length he came to a conclusion, and with guilty steps he withdrew from the room. A flash of lightning revealed him stepping through the doorway, and his hand clutched a stiletto, the companion of the one his son had concealed in his chamber. He groped his way up the stone stairway, and with each step his purpose became firmer. He would fool that Champoy, thwart him at his vengeance. At his son's doorway he paused and clutched the weapon a little tighter. He listened for sounds, but he heard nothing save the regular breathing of his son within. He pushed the door before him and slipped quietly into the room where his son slept.

The count emerged from the doorway, and his hand was empty. Silently he trod down the stone steps, and quietly he resumed his seat in the library. The storm was becoming more violent with the passing of the hours. Idly he picked up the quill before him and toyed with it. He had thwarted Champoy at his own purpose. He smiled exultantly. But these thoughts were rudely interrupted and his hopes were shattered, for suddenly he felt his fingers tighten on the pen, and involuntarily his

(Continued on page 719)

Here Are the Final Chapters of

DROME

By JOHN MARTIN LEAHY

The Story So Far

MILTON RHODES and Bill Carter penetrate the caverns beneath Mount Rainier and rescue Drorathusa, Sibylline priestess of the Dromans, from being dragged to death by an ape-bat. In company with Drorathusa and her companions, they go down into the bowels of the Earth toward the strange underground land of Drome, and penetrate a veritable Dante's Inferno of terrible monsters—tree-octopi, loopmukes and gogrugrons.

CHAPTER 37

AS WE WERE PASSING UNDERNEATH

SOMETHING *was* following us. And we were not dependent solely upon that mysterious sixth sense of mine for knowledge of that sinister fact, either. Sounds were heard. Sometimes it would be a low rustling, as though made by some body gliding through the foliage. Sometimes it would be the snapping of a twig—behind us, off to the right, perhaps, or to the left; never in front of us. Alas, it grieves me to do so, but I am constrained by the love of truth, and by nothing else, to inform the admirers of that great scientist Mark Twain that twigs *do* snap when they are stepped upon. Yes, I wish that we could have had some of those obstreperous applauders of Mark's absurd essay on Fenimore Cooper with us there in that Droman wood! There were other sounds, too, one of them a thing that I could never describe—a faint humming, throbbing sound that seemed to chill the blood in our veins, so weird and frightful a thing that neither Rhodes nor I could even dream of an explanation. And it was in vain that we looked to our Dromans for one. They tried to explain, but their explanation was as mysterious as the fact itself.

Onward we pressed through that terrible place—that abode of bald-headed cats, tree-octopi and unknown monsters.

At last, and for the first time since we had entered the forest, a current of air touched our cheeks, stirred the foliage and the lovely tresses of the ladies. Soon the breeze, soft and gentle, was whispering and sighing among the tree-tops. A gloom pervaded the place; the wood became dark and awful—though through it the light-mist was still drifting, drifting in streams that swayed and shook and quivered. Rhodes and I thought we were going to have another eclipse. But we were wrong. It began to rain—if I may so call that subtile drizzle that came drifting down and, indeed, at times seemed to form in the air before our eyes. I thought that this would stop us, for soon everything was wet and dripping—dripping, dripping. But the Dromans pressed on steadily, grimly. Soon every one of us was wet to the skin.

An hour or so passed, and then the drizzle ceased and the gloom lifted.

Rhodes and I were discussing this strange phenomenon when abruptly he cried out and pointed.

"There!" said he, reaching for his revolver. "At last we have ocular proof that we are being followed!"

This story began in WEIRD TALES for January

Even as he spoke, that faint humming, throbbing sound filled the air.

"Look there! See it, Bill?"

"I see it."

What I saw was an agitation, slight but unmistakable, in the thicket from which we had emerged but a few moments before. Something was moving there—gliding through the dense undergrowth.

I jerked out my revolver. Rhodes had already drawn his.

"Might as well try a shot," said he, "for it won't show itself."

We fired almost simultaneously. There was a smothered crash in the thicket, as though some heavy body had given a powerful lurch sideways. The throbbing of that mysterious, dreadful sound grew faster, louder; the agitated foliage began to shake and quiver violently; and then of a sudden sound and agitation were stilled.

"We got it, Bill!" cried Milton, starting toward the spot.

"For God's sake," I called after him, "don't go over there! Let's get out of this. It may not be dead, and—and we have no idea what the thing is."

"We'll find that out."

I suppose that I should have been going along after him the next moment, but Drorathusa sprang forward with a cry of horror, began tugging at his sleeve and begging him to come back. So earnest was her manner, so great the horror shown by this woman usually so self-contained and emotionless, Rhodes gave in, though with great apparent reluctance. A few moments, and we were moving away from the spot.

This Rhodes has always regretted, for to this day we do not know for certain what that thing was which followed us for so long. I have regretted it more than once myself; but I confess that I had no regrets at the time.

I say we do not know for certain; we do know what Drorathusa and the others thought that it was; but that is a creature so horrible that it must (at any rate, such is the belief of Rhodes and myself) be placed amongst Chimeras, Hydras and such fabled monsters.

At length, after a long and fatiguing march, we reached the spot where the river goes plunging over a tremendous precipice. The falls are perpendicular, their height at least half a thousand feet. It was necessary to move off to the right for a considerable distance to find a way of descent. The bottom reached, we headed for the stream. There we found the boat which the Dromans had left in their outward journey, and beside it was a second and smaller one.

This strange craft was something of a mystery to our Hypogeans; but Drorathusa found a message, traced on the inner surface of a piece of bark, and that seemed to clarify the matter somewhat. Drorathusa held up three fingers; three men had come in that boat. And one of them, she told us, must have been the man whose body we had found hanging in the tentacle of the octopus. What had become of the victim's companions? Why had the trio come into a place so dreadful? Well, why had we?

Our journey for this day was already a long one, but we did not halt in that spot. We got into the boat and went floating down the stream, to get away from the thunder of the falling waters.

One thing, by the way, that from the very beginning had intrigued Rhodes and me not a little was the relationship subsisting amongst our Dromans. It had at first been my belief (though never that of Rhodes) that Drorathusa was the wife of Narkus. Ere long, however, it had become clear to me that wife she was

not. But what was she? His daughter, Rhodes had said. And daughter I had at length decided, and still believed, that she was. In short, we put the relationship as follows, and I may as well say at once that the future was to place its O. K. upon this bit of Sherlock-Holmesing of ours: Narkus was the father of all our Dromans except one, Siris, and to her he was father-in-law.

This little mystery cleared up—at any rate, to our satisfaction—we tackled another, which was this: what *was* Drorathusa? I think it has been made sufficiently obvious that she was no ordinary woman. But what was she? The only answer that Rhodes and I had been able to find was that Drorathusa was indeed a Sibyl, a priestess or something of the kind. And again I may as well say at once that we were right.

But why had they set out on a journey so strange, so hazardous and so fearful—through the land of the tree-octopi and snakelike cats, through that horrible, unearthly fungoid forest, and up and up, up into the caves of utter blackness, across that frightful chasm, up to Tamahnowis Rocks, into the blaze of the sunshine, out onto the snow and ice on Rainier?

It was as though we suddenly had entered a fairyland, so wonderful was this gliding along on the placid bosom of the river when contrasted with the fatigues, dangers and horrors through which we had passed. There was nothing to do but steer the boat, keep her out in the stream; and so hours, the whole day long was passed in the languorous luxury of resting, in watching the strange tropical trees glide past and in making such progress as we were able in acquiring a knowledge of the Droman language. We found the ladies much better teachers than Thumbra and Narkus. In fact, there was simply no comparison. Why they should have proven so immeasurably superior in this respect to the representatives of the brainy sex, I do not presume to explain. I merely record a fact; its explanation I leave to those who know more about science than I do.

For two days we glided through that lovely land, whose loveliness was a mask, so to speak, and but made the place the more terrible.

Late in the afternoon of this second day—how strange these words seem! But what others can I use? Late in the afternoon of this second day, we entered a swamp. The current became sluggish, our drift even more so, and right glad were we to put out the oars—of which, though, there were only two pairs—and send her along, for that was not a place in which any sane man would want to linger. Besides the oars, however, there were several paddles, and we sent the boat at a good clip through the dark and sullen waters.

Weird masses of moss and weirder filaments hung from the great branches, which at times met over the stream.

We were passing underneath one of these gnarled and bearded arches when there came a piercing shriek from Delphis, accompanied rather than followed by a cry from Drorathusa of *"Loopmuke!"*

I dropped the oars and reached for my revolver, turned and saw Narkus, standing in the bow, whip out his sword and slash savagely at the winged monster as it came driving down upon him.

CHAPTER 38

SOMETHING BESIDES MADNESS

THERE was a shock. The boat, I thought, was surely going over. Came a heavy plunge, and she righted, though sluggishly, for water had come pouring over the side in gal-

lons. Narkus had vanished. The demon was struggling madly on the surface, one of its great wings almost shorn clean from the body. An instant, and the head of Narkus was seen emerging. Almost at that very second, Rhodes fired at the ape-bat; a convulsive shudder passed through the hideous body, which slowly sank and disappeared. Narkus showed the most admirable coolness. He did not dash at the side of the boat, as nine men out of ten would have done, but swam quietly to the stern, where he was drawn inboard without shipping a spoonful of water—unhurt but minus his sword.

Two hours afterward, we reached firm ground, which soon became high and rocky. The vegetation there was sparse and dwarfish, and the place had a look indescribably wild and forbidding. Then at last we came to the end of the cavern itself. Yes, there before us, beetling up for hundreds of feet, up to the very roof, rose the rocky wall—into a cleft in which the river slowly and silently went gliding, like some monstrous serpent.

We passed the night in that spot and in the morning entered the cleft, which, in my troubled imagination, seemed to open wider to receive us.

Oh, what a strange, dreadful place was that in which we now found ourselves! One thought of lost souls and nameless things. Ere long there was no perceptible current, and so out came the oars again. The place was a perfect labyrinth—a place of gloom and at times of absolute darkness. We were no less than three whole days in that awful maze of rock and water; but it was to emerge into a landscape beautiful beyond all description.

The region was a wilderness, but soon—the day after that in which we issued from the labyrinth, in fact—we sighted our first habitation of man in this world of Drome. The next day we reached a village, where we passed the night. We were much struck by the deep respect with which Drorathusa was received. As for our own reception—well, that gave us something to think about.

Not that there was any sign of menace. It was the looks, the very mien of those Hypogeans that puzzled and worried Rhodes and myself. That Drorathusa endeavored to allay the suspicion or dread (or whatever it was) in the minds of the people was as clear to us as if we had understood every word spoken. The manner, however, in which they received her address but enhanced our uneasiness. No voice was raised in dissent to what she said; but there was no blinking the fact that there was no acquiescence whatever in what she urged so earnestly.

"What on earth, Milton," I asked, "does it mean?"

"Ask me something I can tell you, Bill," was Rhodes' consoling answer. "You know, when we came in sight of that first Droman habitation, I thought that now our troubles were over."

"So did I."

"But we were wrong, Bill; we were wrong. It is a queer business, and goodness only knows what it means."

"It means trouble," I told him.

And the very next day showed that I was right.

We embarked at an early hour the following morning and in another and larger boat. It had a high ornamented prow and was indeed a lovely little craft. This day's voyage brought us to the City of Lellolando. It has a population of about fifteen thousand, and there Rhodes and I had our first sight of the beautiful Droman architecture—as displayed, that is, in the public buildings, for the dwellings are in no wise remarkable. These public buildings are not many, of course, in a place so small,

but their beauty filled us with amazement.

Incomparably the most wonderful is the temple, builded upon the summit of a great rounded rock in almost the very center of the city. It was as though we had been transported back to "the glory that was Greece." Yes, it is my belief, and the belief of Rhodes also, that this temple would not have suffered could it by some miracle have been placed beside the celebrated temple of Diana at Ephesus. Buildings more wonderful than this we were to see, the grandest of all the great temple in Nornawnla Prendella, the Golden City, which is the capital of Drome; but I do not think that anything we saw afterward struck us with greater wonder and amazement.

"Some Chersiphron," said Rhodes, "must have wandered from Drome and finally made his way up into ancient Greece and taught the secrets of his art there. It is indeed a marvel that the art of the ancient Hellenes and this of Drome are so very similar. And yet they must have been autochthonous.

"But," he added, "I wonder what they worship in that splendid place. Some horrible pantheon, perhaps."

"Let us," said I, "give them the benefit of the doubt. For all we know to the contrary, these Dromans may be true monotheists."

And this, I rejoice to say, the Dromans are—though, I regret to subjoin, there are some very absurd things in their religion, things dark and even things terrible.

But I anticipate in this, for it was just after we landed that it happened.

We had started up one of the principal streets, on our way to the house of a high functionary—though, of course, Rhodes and I had no idea whither we were bound. On each side the street was a solid mass of humanity—many of the young people, by the way, having hair as white as snow, like that of our Delphis. Of a sudden a man, lean of visage and with eyes that glowed like red coals, broke through the guards (a half-dozen or so were marching along on either side of our little procession) and slashed savagely at the face of Rhodes with a great curved dagger. Rhodes sprang aside, almost thrusting me onto my knees, and the next instant he dealt the man a blow with his alpenstock. The blow, however, was a slanting one, ineffectual. With a scream, the fellow sprang again, his terrible knife upraised; but the guards threw themselves upon him, and he was dragged off, struggling and screaming like a maniac.

Of a truth, Rhodes had had a narrow escape. And what did it mean?

"It must have been the act of a madman," I said.

"It might have been," was Milton's answer. "But unless I am greatly mistaken, there was something besides madness back of it."

CHAPTER 39

THE GOLDEN CITY

Our stay in that place was marred by no other untoward incident; but right glad was I when, on the following morning, we were in our boat and going down the stream once more.

"We ought to be safe out here," I remarked at last.

"I don't know about that, Bill," smiled Milton. "The stream is not a wide one, certainly, and those bushes and trees that line the bank offer —look at that!"

But a hundred feet or so before us, a boat was gliding out from the concealment of a mass of foliage. There were three men in it, and the looks which they fixed upon us were lowering and sinister.

"Look at that fellow!" said Rhodes, drawing his revolver. "If that isn't the chap who broke through with the amicable intention of carving me, all I have to say is that it is his twin brother."

This man was thin almost to emaciation, but his companions were burly fellows, every lineament of them bespeaking the ruffian.

They held their craft stationary or nearly so. In a few moments, therefore, we were drawing near to them. Drorathusa had arisen, and she spoke to the occupants of the strange boat in a rather sharp, imperious manner. Her presence, or her words, seemed to awe them; and I was thanking our lucky stars that, after all, there was not going to be any trouble, when of a sudden, just as the drift of our boat brought Rhodes and me alongside, their bridled passions burst forth in a storm of snarls, cries and fierce gestures of menace. There was a moment when I thought that they were actually going to attempt to board us. But they then drew off, though there was no diminution in that storm of abuse, execrations and threats that was hurled upon us. All three were armed, but no motion toward their weapons was made. The reason for that, I suppose, was the sight of Narkus and Thumbra standing there each with an arrow to the string. Certainly the fellows did not in any way fear *our* weapons.

Some minutes passed, during which the two boats continued to drift side by side and that hideous clamor filled the air. At last, in an attempt to put an end to it, Rhodes raised his revolver and took careful aim. Drorathusa gave a cry and then addressed some fierce words to the trio. In all likelihood, she did not know what Rhodes was going to do. He fired. As he was standing and as but a few yards separated the boats, the bullet, which struck just above the waterline, went out through the bottom. The change was magical. You should have seen those fellows! Whether it was the report of the weapon or whether it was that hole through which the water came spouting in, I do not know; but the taming of those wild men was swift and complete. As soon as they had recovered their wits, round flew the bow of their boat and away they went toward the shore. Our Dromans burst into laughter, even Drorathusa. And that was the last that we saw of those three fanatics.

But why had they done it? Wherefore were Rhodes and I the objects of a hatred so fierce and insensate?

Nor were we permitted to forget that fact. Intelligence of our arrival had spread almost as quickly as though it had been broadcast by radio, and along the banks the people were waiting, in twos and threes, in scores and in hundreds, to see the men from the mysterious and fearful world above—harbingers, in their minds, of calamities and nameless things. Goodness only knows how many fists were shaken at Rhodes and me during the day, how many were the maledictions that they hurled upon us. Happily, however, there was no act of hostility.

"You know, Bill," Milton smiled, "I am beginning to wish that we were back there among those *gogrugrons* and tree-octopuses."

This day's voyage brought us to the City of Dranocrad. There a change was made that certainly did not displease me—from our little craft to none other than one of the queen's own, a long beautiful vessel with oarsmen and guards.

The next day we passed a large tributary flowing in from our left from out a yawning cavern there. This was by no means, however, the first cave we had seen entering the main one. As one moves through some valley in the mountains, smaller

ones are seen coming in on either hand; and so it was in this great cavern of Drome, save that the valleys were caves. In that place, the great cavern itself has a width of two miles or more, and it is four or five thousand feet up to the vaulted roof.

"One wonders," said I, "why the roof doesn't cave in."

"Pooh, Bill!" said Rhodes. "One doesn't marvel that natural bridges don't collapse or that the roof of the Mammoth Cave doesn't come crashing down."

THE two days succeeding this brought us into the very heart of Drome, and on the third we reached the Golden City itself.

This, the capital of the Droman nation, is situated at the lower end of a lake, a most picturesque sheet of water some fifteen miles in length. Where the river flows into it and for a distance of about a league down, the lake extends from one wall of the great cavern clean to the other. The walls go straight down and to what depth no man knows.

It was about midafternoon when our boat, followed by a fleet of smaller craft, glided out onto this lovely expanse of water. At a point about half-way down the lake, we had our first view of the Golden City. I say view, but it was in reality little more than a glimpse that we obtained. For, almost at that very moment, a dense gloom fell upon water and landscape. Fierce and dreadful were the flickerings along the roof a mile or more above us. So sudden and awful was the change that even the Dromans seemed astonished. There was a blinding flash overhead, and then utter blackness everywhere.

Rhodes and I flashed on our lights. For a time the Dromans waited, as though expecting the light to come at any moment; but it did not come. Along the shore on either side and in the distant city, lights were gleaming out. A sudden voice came, mystic and wonderful; Rhodes and I turned, and there was Drorathusa standing with arms extended upward in invocation, as we had seen her in that first eclipse. Minutes passed. But the light did not come. At last the oars were put in motion again. Dark and agitated, however, were the looks of the Dromans, and more than one pair of eyes fixed themselves on Rhodes and me in a manner that plainly marked us as objects of some superstitious dread—if, indeed, it was not something worse.

Steadily, however, our boat glided forward through the black and awful scene.

"What is that?" I at length asked. "Can it be a floating palace?"

"A palace it must be," Rhodes answered, "but not a floating one. See that low black mass under it; that is an island."

At this moment Drorathusa moved to our side, and, indicating the great building in question, the windows of which were a perfect blaze of light, she said: "Lathendra Lepraylya."

Her eyes lingered on Rhodes' face, and her look, I saw, was somber and troubled.

So that was the queen's palace? Soon we would be in the presence of this Lathendra (Queen) Lepraylya. What manner of woman was this sovereign of the Dromans? What awaited us there?

I remembered that look of Drorathusa's, and I confess that my thoughts were soon troubled and somber.

CHAPTER 40

BEFORE LEPRAYLYA

ONE by one, in twos and threes and then in a body, the small craft had dropped behind, and now we were alone on the black waters.

"It must have been the eclipse," said Rhodes. "It is plain, Bill, that there is something about this darkness that is mysterious and awful to the Dromans. It must be in some way a most extraordinary eclipse."

There *was* something awful—something more awful than we thought. And what troubled me the most was this: they seemed to think that we men from the world above had something to do with this dread darkness—already one of far longer duration than any eclipse any living Droman had ever known. Indeed, none such had been recorded for what we would call centuries, and the last had been the harbinger of the most fearful calamities.

We knew full well that some superstition was pointing a fell finger in our direction; but through the mind of neither flickered the thought that this eclipse might, so to speak, be metamorphosed into a death-charge against us.

As we were drawing in to the palace, a heavy voice came across the water. On the instant the rowers rested on their oars. Our commander answered the hail, the heavy voice came again, whereupon the oars were dipped and our craft glided in toward the landing place.

Like a great lovely water-bird, our boat swung in to the landing place, where she was at once made fast.

And then a strange thing happened.

Rhodes and I stepped from the boat together. Since the light had gone out in that fierce and terrible flash, not the faintest glimmer had shone overhead—anywhere. But, at that very instant in which *we* set foot on the island, there came a flash wrathful and awful.

For a few seconds the palace, the water, the city, the distant walls of rock stood out in bold relief, as though in the glare of leprous fire. Then utter darkness again. It was like (and yet very unlike, too) a lightning flash; but no thunder roared, not the faintest sound was heard. Again that leprous light, and this time cries broke out—cries that fear and horror wrung from the Dromans. It was, indeed, an awful moment and an awful scene.

"It looks," said Rhodes, "as though the world is coming to an end."

"Certainly," I told him, "it seems as though the Dromans think so. Look at Drorathusa!"

Again she was standing with arms extended upward, and once more that strange, eery voice of hers came sounding. Everyone there, save Rhodes and myself, was kneeling. Little wonder that, as I looked upon that fearful scene, with the leprous light flashing and quivering through the darkness, I thought it must all be a dream.

The flashes became more frequent. The light began to turn opalescent and to shoot and quiver and shake along the roof. Then of a sudden the eclipse—what other word is there to use?—had passed and all was bright once more.

We at once quitted the landing place, ascended a short flight of steps, passed through a most beautiful court and then, having ascended more steps, entered the palace itself.

Our little party was conducted straight to the throne-room. And straight down the great central aisle we went and stood at last before the queen herself.

There is nothing, as we then saw, servile, debasing in Droman court ceremonial. The meanest Droman, indeed, would never dream of kneeling before his queen. A Droman kneels to no man or woman, but to

God only. The sovereign does not owe her queendom to birth; but to merit, or to that which the Dromans deem as such. She is chosen, and she is chosen queen for life. I say she, and I mean she. The Salic law excluded a woman from the throne of France; the Salic law of Drome excludes the man—or, as the Dromans are wont to put it, "no man may be queen"—a proposition that even the most Socratical Droman philosopher has never been known to dispute!

As to the choosing of the Droman sovereign, I should perhaps explain that not everyone has a voice in this. Beggars, prodigals, sociophagites, dunces, nincompoops, fuddle-caps, half-wits, no-wit-at-alls, sharpers, crooks, bunko-men, paupers, thieves, robbers, highwaymen, burglars, madmen and murderers, and some others, are all (I know that this is perfectly incredible and awful, but I solemnly assure you that it is a fact) interdicted the ballot.

Alas, it grieves me more than I could ever express to record so sad an instance of benightment in a people in so many ways so truly enlightened and broad-minded. But I take pride in saying that (when I had attained to something like a real knowledge of the Droman tongue) I described to Lepraylya herself, at the very first opportunity and in the most glowing and eulogistical language at my command, how beautifully we did these things in the world above.

I had (yes, I confess it) flattered myself that I would thus be instrumental in bringing about a great reform, in righting a cruel injustice. Vain vision—vain, alluring dream! As I went on with my panegyric, I saw wonder and amazement gathering in the beautiful eyes of Lepraylya. When I had finished, she sat for some moments like one dumfounded. And, when at last she spoke, it was, as old Rabelais has it, as though her tongue was walking on crutches. What she said was: "My Lord Bill Carter!"

And again after a pause: "My Lord Bill Carter!

"But, then," she added, "it must be an allegory. I confess, however, that the meaning, to my poor intellect at any rate, is involved in the deepest obscurity. Yes, allegory it must be. Surely this world you have described to me exists only in the imagination—is an imaginary world inhabited by imaginary sane people that are in reality lunatics."

But this is anticipating.

There we stood before the Queen of Drome.

And what a vision of loveliness was that upon which we stood gazing! Strange, too, was the beauty of Lathendra Lepraylya, what with her snow-white hair. (Her age I put at about thirty.) The eyes, large and lustrous, were of the lighest gray, the pallid color enhancing the weird loveliness of her. Her dress was of the palest blue; on her brow, in a bejeweled golden diadem, was a large brilliant of pale green, flashing when she moved her look with prismatic hues and fires.

But this woman before whom we stood was no mere beauty. That one saw at the first glance. Wonderful, splendid, one felt, was the mind of her, the soul of Lathendra Lepraylya. And not only that, but it was as though there was something uncanny in those pale gray eyes when she turned them to mine. That look of Lepraylya seemed to go right into my very brain, search out its thoughts and its secret places.

At the time it seemed long, but I suppose that no more than a couple of seconds had passed before she had turned her eyes to Milton Rhodes, upon whom they seemed to linger.

Her snowy face was cold, impassive. Even when she slightly raised her right hand to us in salutation, not the slightest change was perceptible upon it.

The next moment, however, there was a change—when she addressed Drorathusa. For each of the others Lepraylya had a kind word, and then we all moved back a few steps to the seats which had been reserved for us—all save Drorathusa. She, we at once perceived, was about to give an account of the journey up to the mysterious, the awful world above. There was not a vacant seat in all that great room, save one—that for Drorathusa. This was to the left of the throne, as one faces it, together with a dozen or so others, all occupied by persons whom I at once, and rightly, set down as priests and priestesses.

Of this small group (small but most powerful) every member save one was dressed in a robe of snowy white. As for the individual in question, his robe was of the deepest purple, and he had round his head a deep-blue fillet, in which was set a large gem, a diamond, as we afterward learned, of a red so strange and somber that one could not help thinking of blood and weird, dreadful things. We thought that this personage was the high priest, and in this we were not mistaken. He was about sixty years of age, lean to emaciation and with the cold, hard look of the fanatic in his eyes and, indeed, in his every lineament. His face, smooth-shaven, as is the Droman custom, was like that of some cruel bird of prey. Coldly had he received, and returned, the salutation of Drorathusa, and dark with malevolence had been the look which he had fixed upon Rhodes and me.

There could not be the slightest doubt that this human raptor purposed to rend us beak and talon.

CHAPTER 41

HE STRIKES

DRORATHUSA began her story. Lepraylya leaned forward, rested her chin on her left hand and listened with the most careful attention. So still were the listeners that, as the saying has it, you could, anywhere in that great hall, have heard a pin drop.

At times, so expressive were her gestures, Rhodes and I had no difficulty whatever in following Drorathusa; but only at times. I have, however, had access to a transcript of the stenographic record of her story (the Dromans, despite the remarkable polysyllabic character of their language, have most excellent tachygraphers) and wish that space would permit inclusion of it here.

When Drorathusa had finished, the queen (who had several times interrupted with some interrogation) put a number of questions. With two or three exceptions, the answers given by our Sibyl seemed to be satisfactory. But those exceptions gave us something to think about. It was obvious that the queen was troubled not a little by those answers; and she was not, I believed, a woman who would lightly suffer the mask to reveal her thoughts or her feelings.

When the queen had done, came the turn of that high priest, whose name was Brendaldoombro. Up he rose and addressed a few words to Lathendra Lepraylya. Her answer was laconic, accompanied by an assenting motion of her right hand. For a few seconds her look rested upon Rhodes and me, and it was as though across those strange, wondrous pale eyes of hers a shadow had fallen.

As for the high priest, he had instantly, and with a fierceness that he could not bridle, turned to Drorathusa.

How Rhodes and I, as we sat there, wished that we could understand the words being spoken!

"Always, O Drorathusa," said Brendaldoombro, "has your spirit been strange and wayward. Always have you been a seeker after that which is dark and mysterious. And, of a truth, dark and mysterious is the evil which you have now brought upon Drome.

"Never content with what it is given us to know! Always seeking the obscure! Sometimes, I fear, even *that which is forbidden!*"

At those words the eyes of Drorathusa flashed, but she made no answer.

"Cursed was that hour—cursed, I say, be that peeking and searching and peering that discovered it to your eyes, that record of those who, led on by the powers of the Evil One, ventured up into the caves of darkness and at last up into the world above itself—a world, as our holy writings tell us, of fearful and nameless things, of demons who, to achieve their purpose"—here he fixed his vulture eye upon Milton and me—"assume the shapes of men.

"But you must needs find that record, that writing which never should have been written. And you must needs turn a deaf ear to our words of counsel and admonition. You must needs beg and beseech and implore our permission to go yourself up into those fearful places and there see with your own eyes whether that in the writing was true or false. And we, alas, in an evil hour and one of weakness—yes, we did yield to your importunities and your wicked interpretation of our sacred writings and suffer you to go forth."

It seems, however, that just the opposite was the truth—that Brendaldoombro, fearing the growing popularity and power of this extraordinary woman, had been only too glad to see her start for the caverns of darkness, from the black mysteries of which he, of course, had hoped that neither she nor a single one of her companions would ever return.

"Yes, evil was the hour in which you went forth, O Drorathusa the Wayward One. And evil is this in which we see these demons in the shapes of men sitting in our very midst, before the very throne of our queen. Already has God shown His anger, shown it in this darkness which has sent fear to the stoutest heart—this darkness the like of which no living man has ever known in Drome.

"Nor," he went on, his voice rising, "will the divine wrath be softened so long as we, undutiful children that we are, suffer them to live—these devils that have come amongst us in the forms of men! Death!" His voice rose until the hall rang with the fierce tones. "Death to them, I say! Let death be swift and sure! And thus will Drome be spared sorrows, blood and miseries that, else, will wring the heart of the babe new-born and cause it to rise up and fearfully curse father and mother for bringing it into a world of such madness and wo!"

The effect of this impassioned and fiendish outburst was instantaneous and fearful. Something that was like a groan, a growl and a roar filled that great room. One who has never heard it could never believe that so fearful a sound could come from human throats. The Dromans sprang to their feet—not men and women now, but metamorphosed by the cunning and diablerie of Brendaldoombro into veritable fiends.

"We're in for it, Bill!" cried Milton, springing to his feet and whipping out his revolver.

I sprang to his side, and we faced them.

Drorathusa, with a fierce cry, threw herself between us and the crowd.

We were moving slowly backward, back toward the throne. The voice of our Sibyl rang out clear and full. A moment or two, and it was evident that her words were quieting the mad passions of the mob—for mob, at that moment, it certainly was, though composed of the élite of the Droman world. Then of a sudden, full, clear, ringing and aquiver with wrath and suppressed passion, came the voice of Lathendra Lepraylya. Oh, what a vision of fierce loveliness was she as she stood there!

Brendaldoombro had come within a hair's-breadth of achieving his diabolical purpose. And a most fearful vision of thwarted evil was he at that moment. He knew his auditors, though, and he knew his power. Again he raised his impassioned voice. Lepraylya, however, turned upon him fiercely.

"Peace!" she cried. "I bid you, peace—yes, even you, O Brendaldoombro, High Priest of Drome though you are!

"What! You would still make of this room a shambles, stain the very throne of your queen with human blood?

"Ho, guard!" said she, turning. "Guard, ho!"

It is my belief that some cool-headed fellow had bethought himself of the guard before even the queen. For it was only a moment or two before a score or so of armed men had entered the room, and taken a position, in the form of a semicircle, before the throne.

There, above those grim men, rose the blue figure of the queen, her eyes blazing like that great jewel on her brow. Those eyes she fixed upon Brendaldoombro, and I actually thought that the old raptor quailed a little under that look of outraged majesty. If this was indeed so, 'twas for an instant only. His look, one of baffled fury, then became fierce and defiant.

"So!" said Lathendra Lepraylya. "What madness is this that I see? What blood-howl is this that I hear? No woman or man in Drome may be deprived of liberty or life without fair trial; and yet you, yes, even you, O Brendaldoombro, are here striving to make a shambles of the very throne itself!"

She raised a hand and pointed toward us.

"If these men are indeed——"

"They are not men!" the old villain shouted. "They are demons who have taken the human shape, to attain here in Drome some fell purpose. Death, I say! Let death be swift and——"

"Peace, I say!" exclaimed Lepraylya, stamping her sandaled foot. "And, if these men from the world above are indeed but devils counterfeit, could we kill them, O Brendaldoombro? Since when can mere man kill a devil?"

"When they are in human shape, he can! Death! Death to these——"

"One can kill their bodies only, even if he can do that."

"What more," demanded Brendaldoombro, "can one do to any woman or man? Death! Death to the demons!"

"Their spirits would be but loosed from the body to move unseen in the air about us, and they could then the more easily achieve their nefarious designs."

"They would be harmless then!" came the ready answer. "They are helpless save when in human form."

"Since when?" queried Lepraylya, her eyes widening in surprize. "Since when did the angels of the Evil One become helpless unless in human shape?"

"You misapprehend, O Lathendra Lepraylya. These belong to a most peculiar order, a most rare species of

bad angel. And," cried Brendaldoombro, "they are the worst devils of all! Death to them before it is too late! Let us——"

"Have justice," said Lepraylya, "as we hope for mercy and justice in that dread day when every human soul—even yours, O Brendaldoombro—must stand and be judged for the sins it has done in the flesh. No human being may be condemned in Drome without trial; and I believe that Lord Milton and Lord Bill are true men, O Brendaldoombro, and no demons. And you would slay them, murder them, these the first men from the world above, as you would slay a *gogrugron*—if you did not fear it, O Brendaldoombro. Who knows what message they bring to us? Now they stand silent; but, when they will have learned our language, then we shall learn that which is now so dark and mysterious."

"Dark and mysterious indeed!" cried the high priest. "Signs and portents have been given us, warning us of what is to follow if we harbor these demons amongst us. And I tell you, O Lathendra Lepraylya, you and all Drome shall rue this day if you heed not the dread warnings of the wrath divine. Darkness I see! Yes, I see darkness! And earthshocks! Calamities that will overwhelm all Drome and——"

"Silence!" Lepraylya commanded. "Silence, croaker of evil. One would almost think, O Brendaldoombro, that you know more about the angels of the Evil One than you do about God's own. Hear now my word:

"When Lord Bill and Lord Milton can answer the charge that they are demons masquerading in the shapes of men, then, O Brendaldoombro, and not before, shall they be brought to trial—if, indeed, you will prefer that charge against them, *then*.

"Such is my word to you, O Brendaldoombro, and to you, ladies and lords all, and on the majesty of the Droman law and of the dread law of God it stands!"

CHAPTER 42

DRORATHUSA

And so it was that we reached, there in the palace of the Droman queen, our journey's end—certainly a stranger journey than any I ever have heard of and one that ought to prove of even greater interest to science than to the world in general. If, however, what they tell of the region is true, an expedition to the mysterious land that the Dromans call Grawngrograr would make our fearful journey to Drome look like a promenade to fairyland.

But there our journey ended, and now it is that my story rapidly draws to a close.

Probably you will think that, here under the egis of Lathendra Lepraylya, we found ourselves in clover. And, in a way, this was undoubtedly so. We were given each a splendid suite of rooms, in the palace itself, and our lives were as the lives of princes—save that the close guard always kept over us was a reminder that there was such a personage in the world as one Brendaldoombro. If it had not been for that vulture shadow, how wonderful those days would have been!

But that shadow was there, and it never lifted. And the worst of it was that everything was involved in the deepest mystery and gloom, what with our ignorance of the Droman language. Forsooth, however, had we been masters of that language, we could not have known the plots that were hatching in the dark skull of Brendaldoombro.

As for the language, we were studying it with diligence and really had cause to be astonished at the rapidity of our progress. As to the high priest, crafty and consummate

villain though he was, that worthy found that Lathendra Lepraylya was quite his match and more than his match, as, indeed, was Drorathusa. Against the queen he was powerless to take any repressive measure; but the case was very different with regard to Drorathusa. He could act in this way, and he did.

She was sent to a distant, lonely, forsaken place on the very outskirts of the empire. According to all accounts, that spot is really a terrible one. Drorathusa was, in fact, in exile—though Brendaldoombro did not like to hear anyone call it that. But almost everybody did or regarded it as such, and there were murmurs, not only amongst the Droman people, but even amongst those priestesses and priests whom the old villain had counted upon to applaud his every word and act.

Nor did time still those murmurs. On the contrary, they grew louder, more persistent. Brendaldoombro was learning that it is one thing to send a person into exile and quite another to banish that person from the popular esteem. Nor did he stop at banishment; he had recourse to the assassin's dagger and the arts of the poisoner. But, in all these attempts upon the life of Drorathusa, he was thwarted by the agents of the queen. Lepraylya knew her opponent, and she had at once taken measures to safeguard the life of the exiled priestess, who held as high a place in the esteem of her sovereign as she did in the hearts of the people.

How strange it seems to be writing of things like these in this the Twentieth Century, the Golden Age of Science. But, as I believe I have already remarked, Science hasn't discovered everything yet. This is a stranger, a more wonderful, a more mysterious old globe than even Science herself dreams it to be.

When our acquisition of the language became a real one, we began to learn something of the science of Drome and to impart a knowledge of the wonderful science of our own world. Never shall I forget the amazement of the queen and those learned men of Drome when Rhodes brought his mathematics into play. Problems that only a Droman Archimedes could solve, and that only after much labor (what with their awful notation) Rhodes solved, presto—just like that! So unwieldy was the system of notation employed by these Hypogeans that not even their greatest mathematicians had been able to do more than roughly approximate *pi*.

When Rhodes proceeded to the solution of trigonometrical problems, their amazement knew no bounds. And when he explained to them that all they had to do to become masters of such problems was to discard their cumbersome notation and adopt the simple numerals used by ourselves—well, I do actually believe that that was the straw that broke the back of Brendaldoombro's power! For (strange though it may seem to a world that is more interested in moonshine than it is in science) that brought over to our side every learned man in Drome and a majority of the people themselves. Nor should I forget the priests and priestesses. Your average Droman is much interested in all things of a scientific nature, and no one more so than the true priest or priestess—though there are, of course, some lamentable exceptions.

Yes, clearly we were men and not demons, else never would we have brought such wonders as these to offer them as gifts to the Dromans. But old Brendaldoombro had his answer ready.

"Instead," said he, "that proves they are *not* men; only devils could be such wizards!"

I have often wondered what dark thoughts would have passed through

that dark brain of his had he been there the day that Rhodes showed Lepraylya, all those learned men and all those grand lords and ladies (ladies and lords, a Droman would say) the marvels of a steam-engine. Yes, there the little thing was, only two feet or so high but perfect in all its parts, puffing away merrily, and puffing and puffing, and all those Dromans looking on in wonder and delight.

Even as we sat there, came word that Brendaldoombro was dead. He had died suddenly and painlessly just after placing his hand in blessing on the head of a little child.

Well, they gave him a magnificent funeral. Peace to his soul!

On the death of the Droman high priest (or priestess) a successor is chosen, in the great temple in the Golden City, by a synod composed of exactly five hundred, the majority of whom are usually priestesses. On the very first ballot, Drorathusa (who was already on her way back from her lonely place of exile) was chosen.

Priests and priestesses, I should perhaps remark, are free to marry, unless they have taken the vow of celibacy. This (voluntarily, of course) many of them do. Drorathusa, by the way, had not done so.

We had now been in Drome a little over seven months. It was not very long afterward that Rhodes told me he was going to get married—to Lathendra Lepraylya herself! The news, however, was not wholly unexpected. Well, not every man of us can marry a queen—though of queens there are plenty.

I take the following from my journal for May the 10th:

"They were married today, about 10 o'clock, in the great temple; and a very grand wedding it was, too. Drorathusa herself spoke the words that made them man and wife, for the queen of Drome can be married by the high priestess or priest only.

"Now, as she proceeded with the ceremony, which was a very long one, I thought that that pale face of Drorathusa's grew paler still and that a distraught look was coming into her eyes. Then I told myself that 'twas only a fancy. But it was not fancy. For of a sudden her lip began to tremble, her voice faltered, the look in her eyes became wild and helpless—and she broke down.

"A moment or two, however, and that extraordinary woman had got control over herself again. She motioned the attendant priestesses and priests aside; a wan smile touched her lips as she pressed a hand to her side and said: 'It was my heart—but I am better now.'

"She at once proceeded with the ceremony, voice and features under absolute control. Again she was Drorathusa the Sibylline.

"And so they were married. And may they live happy and happily ever after!"

And then, after the great nuptial banquet in the palace, off went the happy pair in the queen's barge for Lella Nuramanistherom, a lovely royal suite some thirty miles down the river; whilst I betook myself to the solitude of my rooms, there to ponder on the glad-sad lot of man, to hear over and over, and over again, those low tragic words: "It was my heart—but I am better now."

Sibylline, noble, poor Drorathusa!

CHAPTER 43

WE SEE THE STARS

When facing the dangers, mysteries, horrors (and other things) of our descent to this strange and wonderful subterranean land, how often I said to myself: "If ever I get out of this, never again!" And I truly believed it at the time, though I

should have known better. I should have known—I *did* know that adventure and mystery have inexplicable and most dreadful charms. Indeed, the more fearful the Unknown, the more eager a man (one who has heard the Siren song which adventure and mystery sing) is to penetrate to its secret places—unless, indeed, the charms of some Lepraylya or Drorathusa entwine themselves about the heart. In my case, that can never be. There is a grave in the valley of the Snoqualmie, under the shadow of old Mount Si—but tears dim the page, and I can not write of that. Even Milton Rhodes does not know.

Here was I in the Golden City; here was everything, it would seem, that could conduce to contentment, to that peace of mind which is dearer than all. Yet I was restless and really unhappy. And the Unknown was calling, calling and calling for me to come. To what? Perhaps to wonders the like of which Science never has dreamed. Perhaps to horrors and mysteries from which the imagination of even a Dante or a Doré would shrink and flee in mad terror —things nameless, worse than a thousand deaths.

But I wanted to go. Yes, I *would* go. I would go into that fearful Land of Grawngrograr—discover its mysteries or perish in the attempt.

And I am going, too. That journey has not been abandoned, only delayed. It was like this.

I was drawing up, in my mind, tentative plans (my purpose was yet a secret) when one day Rhodes came in, and, after smiling in somewhat enigmatic fashion for some moments, he suddenly asked: "I say, Bill, how would you like to see the stars, the sun again?"

"The sun? Milton, what do you mean?"

"That I am going back to the surface. I thought that you would want to go along."

"What in the world are you going back for?"

"There are many things that we ought to have here—a book of logarithms, the best in the world, is one of them. We'll get those things, or as many as we can, for it would be impossible to bring them all. We'll wind up our sublunary affairs, and, hurrah, then back to Drome! What do you say to that, old *tillicum?*"

"What does Lepraylya say?"

"At first she wouldn't even hear of my going. But I have at last gained her consent. With our large party, there can not be any danger."

I was not sure of that, but I kept those thoughts to myself.

"Of course, I want to go," I told him. "But there is something that I don't understand."

"Which is what?"

"We can't keep our great discovery a secret. And, as soon as the world has it, adventurers, spoilers, crooks and parasites will come swarming down that passage. We'll loose upon our poor Dromans a horde of Pizarros."

"Did I think for one single moment that what you say, or anything like it, would follow, never one step would I take toward the sun. You say that we can not keep the discovery of Drome a secret; we can, and we will—until such time as it will not matter. We will come out onto the glacier in the night-time. Our way of egress—I suppose we'll have to tunnel our way out through the ice, that there will not be any accommodating crevasse there—will be most carefully concealed. No one will see us come out. No one will know of our journeys to and from the Tamahnowis Rocks, for they will be made under the cover of darkness. No one will know."

"Our long absence?" I queried. "This is the month of July—thanks

to your chronometer-watch and your careful record, we know the very hour. Almost a whole year has gone by since that day we went forth upon the mountain. How are we going to explain that to the curious?"

"Tut, tut!" smiled Milton. "If all our difficulties could be so easily solved as that!"

"I believe, however," he went on, "that we ought to leave the world, our world, a record of the discovery. I will set down to the extent that time permits those things which, in my opinion, will interest the scientific world. As for the discovery itself, the journey and our adventures, yours, Bill, is the hand to record that."

"A record?" I exclaimed. "Then why all this secrecy, this moving under cover of darkness, if you are going to broadcast the discovery of Drome to the whole world?"

"Because we will then have left that world and the way to this will have been blasted up and otherwise closed."

"That," I told him, "will never keep them out."

"I think that it will. And, if any ever does find his way down, he'll never return to the surface; he'll spend the rest of his days here in Drome, even if he lives to be as old as Methuselah. Be sure you put that into the record! The Dromans are human, and so they are not quite saints. But their land is never going to be infested with plunderers, dope-peddlers and bootleggers if I can prevent it, and I feel confident that I can.

"This closing of the way will not mean complete isolation. At any rate, I hope that it will not. For I feel confident that ere very long the two worlds will communicate with each other by radio—yes, that each will even *see*, by means of television, the inhabitants and the marvels of the other."

One or two weird things befell us during our return journey, but time presses and I can not pause to record them here. The party was composed of picked men, one of whom was Narkus. We had one ape-bat. This going up was a more difficult business, I want to tell you, than our going down had been. There was one consolation: we did not get lost.

Onward and upward we toiled, and at last, on the 28th of July, we reached the Tamahnowis Rocks.

This was about 10 o'clock in the morning. The way out was completely blocked by the ice. Cool air, however, was flowing in through fissures and clefts in the walls and the roof of the tunnel. We waited until along toward midnight, for fear someone might be about—that some sound might reveal the secret of the rock.

It was about 11 o'clock when we began to dig our way out through the ice. The tunnel was not driven out into the glacier but up alongside the rock wall, through the edge of the ice-stream. Hurrah! At last our passage was through! And, as old Dante has it:

"Thence issuing we again beheld the stars."

[THE END]

PHANTOM FINGERS

By Robert S. Carr

"The hands floated, armless, toward his throat."

"NEVERTHELESS," declared Alfred Meyers to himself with a certain tightening of the lips, "spirits do not return, much less materialize and lay their hands on peoples' shoulders!"

He walked nervously down the broad front steps of the old brownstone building, turned, and started briskly toward the rumble of heavy traffic on the avenue. A tired clerk shuffling his way to the subway would have casually glanced at Alfred Meyers and seen a pale, slim man of indefinite years whose gait held a hint of tense nervousness. But a keen-eyed physician brushing close by might have noticed a significant tinge of his eyeballs and a tiny telltale twitching of his mouth.

Alfred Meyers had been to his first materialization seance and it had stirred him a great deal more than anything had been able to do for a long, long while. An extremely disturbing subject had been revived, a subject which Meyers thought he had succeeded in putting forever out of the range of his conscience—namely, his addiction to cocain. A vague, cloudlike figure which claimed to be his father had appeared, a figure whose hands——

A nervous tremor shook Alfred's slim body. He quickened his pace and tried his best to put down the fresh and active memory of the darkened room he had so recently left. Time enough for such thoughts when he had reached his rooms and quieted his quivering nerves.

He hunched his shoulders up and together as if he were facing a biting north wind. His steps lengthened until he was nearly running. Soon the face which had been merely pale and serious when he descended the steps of the brownstone building was

rapidly becoming a haggard ashen mask. Oh, if he could only hold up under the gnawing within until he reached the next street!

Eyes sunken and dull, lips twitching uncontrollably, he stumbled up the steps of the apartment house to his rooms. Inside, he leaped for the drawer of his desk. With shaking, icy fingers he found his cigarette case, jerked the dummy tray of cigarettes out and snatched one of the tiny waxed envelopes that were packed snugly beneath the false bottom. Shuddering with abject craving, he clumsily tore open the envelope, tapped a pinch of fine white cocain out into the back of his hand and traced the powdery stuff into a little ridge with his forefinger. He leaned over in frantic eagerness and with a quick, spasmodic inhalation sniffed up every particle.

The psychological effect of the stuff was instant. Although his lips still twitched and his eyes rolled helplessly from side to side, he sank into a deep armchair and relaxed. His fingers closed over the cigarette case in a clawlike grip. He must never forget his cigarettes again, he told himself, especially when there was any likelihood of his encountering as unnerving a set of circumstances as that seance had been.

Bit by bit the color crept back into his cheeks and his facial muscles relaxed. He smiled, lay comfortably back in his chair and chuckled. That seance had been amusing! In a luxury of blissful contentment he allowed himself to live over the episode of the afternoon. He recalled the frame of mind he had been in—a secretly cynical attitude of investigation. Physically and mentally he had been in a state which was very nearly normal—that phase of several hours' duration which comes to an addict after every trace of the effects of the drug has worn off, but before the system has begun to call for more.

He had been met at the door of the brownstone house by a middle-aged gentleman.

"Mr. Addison?"

"Yes, come in."

Meyers looked at Mr. Addison closely. He was a man a trifle under medium height, with thin, silver-gray hair. His face was that of a scholar—lined, delicate, sensitive, but behind it lurked the suggestion of tremendous nervous energy and a powerful personality. He was a man that seemed in a subtle way like a powerful spring of finest tempered steel, the vital part of some mighty, silent engine; a spring which seemed merely a quiet coil till one looked very closely and saw that it was a living thing, humming soundlessly under the weight of terrific withheld power. Mr. Addison's voice was well modulated, his dress retiring, and his bearing one of absolute poise.

He showed Alfred into a high-ceilinged, old-fashioned, dark oak room and motioned him into a chair. The whole house seemed steeped in an atmosphere of calm silence. Meyers looked about him and felt a bit surprized. So far he had seen none of the tin trumpets, incense stands and Egyptian draperies that he had somehow always associated with spiritualism. The room was furnished a bit sparsely and severely, but with evident good taste.

"You are the Mr. Meyers who made the appointment by 'phone yesterday?"

"Yes. Is the—ah—seance held right in here?"

"Yes, Mr. Meyers . . . Miss Addison, my daughter, will be down presently. She thinks we shall be able to get some very good materializations this afternoon."

"Your daughter is the—medium?"

"Exactly. You understand, Mr. Meyers, that any rash action you

might possibly be tempted to make could very easily result in the death of my daughter. Materialization is an extremely serious affair, involving the life-forces of the medium."

Alfred Meyers started imperceptibly and shot a disturbed look at the speaker. Rash actions had been precisely what he was thinking of when Mr. Addison spoke. For the first time he noticed what compelling, piercing eyes the older man had.

Both turned as a girl entered the room. She was a frail little wisp of a thing, beautiful in the same way as a rare lily—waxlike, colorless, and yet palpitating with fragile life. She acknowledged Meyers with a faint smile, but turned away abruptly as she felt his eyes travel up and down her figure appraisingly.

Mr. Addison was standing on a heavy chair fastening a black curtain across an empty corner of the room. Meyers stood waiting. The other stepped down and lifted the big chair easily to one side. Alfred could not help noticing Mr. Addison's hands as they gripped the dark wood. They were very large hands, but so extremely well-proportioned that their size did not make them conspicuous. The fingers were long and immensely powerful. Meyers saw the cords stand out on the backs of Mr. Addison's hands like great wires as he moved the chair.

A moment later Alfred himself casually attempted to pull the same chair to one side and sit down. To his surprize he was unable to move it. He took a firm hold and pulled. It moved slightly. The chair was massively built of solid mahogany and amazingly heavy. Meyers looked again at those huge fine hands of Mr. Addison's with a feeling akin to awe.

The girl seated herself in the little curtained-off corner of the room. Mr. Addison carefully parted the curtain so that his daughter's head and shoulders were visible. She sat quietly, her body relaxed and her eyes closed.

As Mr. Addison pulled down the heavy window-blinds, Alfred stole stealthy, covetous glances at her pale face. The room suddenly became quite dark as the last blind came down. The face in the oval parting of the curtains dimmed to a white blur.

Meyers was seated in the center of the room facing the curtained corner. Mr. Addison sat to his left and slightly in front of him. For perhaps a minute there was utter silence. Then the older man began to sing *Nearer, My God, to Thee* in a very low, soft voice. Alfred hummed an accompaniment, a rather irregular and broken accompaniment, for it had been years since he had heard that piece sung. It brought back disquieting memories . . .

The singing gradually grew softer and softer until it ceased entirely. Alfred's eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom and he again closely scrutinized the still form of the girl. Her face was now rigid and motionless. She looked unpleasantly like a corpse. Meyers correctly guessed that she was in a trance.

Presently, between the curtains, next to the floor, was a slight movement. The agitation increased until an uneasy patch of white appeared. It wavered and shook like a cloud of thick, restless smoke. The thing grew steadily and rapidly till within two minutes of its first appearance it had assumed the vague outline of a tall, thin man, taller by far than the girl who was still perfectly visible, lying unconscious in the chair.

After standing quietly a moment, the figure of the man glided slowly across the room. Alfred felt a curious numbness creep over him as he recognized the features of his father. The materialized spirit stood close to him and spoke in a throaty whis-

per. He said the things Alfred's father would have said in life—hard, uncompromising things that made the young man cringe. As his father bent over him to deliver a parting sentence, Alfred felt a heavy hand laid on his shoulder. He started, then squirmed in his chair as the cold sweat trickled down his face. He had rather fancied himself talking to some uncertain nebulosity, perhaps even a hoax; accordingly the realization that the hand he had just felt on his shoulder was of some definite substance came as quite a shock to him. As the figure slowly retreated toward the curtain, Meyers pulled himself together somewhat and looked very closely at the hands. The man's body was a bit cloudlike and unreal—it might easily be an illusion or even a clever reflection—but those hands were as solid flesh and blood as his own! Very clear and well-defined they were, hanging loosely at the ends of the more indistinct arms. While the form slowly dwindled and finally disappeared under the curtains, Meyers caught himself scrutinizing the massive, beautiful hands of Mr. Addison.

No sooner had the first figure been completely dissipated than another began to form. Timorously Alfred watched it grow, expand, and take on a settled outline as the other had done. At last it assumed the shape of a rather small man who walked with a slight limp toward the center of the floor. He halted and pointed his finger at Meyers accusingly. Again the hands stood out more clearly than the rest of the form. Meyers thought that he could see the spirit's lips moving, but he heard no sound. Addison reached back and plucked his sleeve.

"He keeps repeating the name of Kane—Roger Kane," he whispered quickly; "his forces are rather weak. Do you recognize the name?"

Again the cold sweat burst out in glassy beads on Meyers' face. This was too much! Roger Kane was the name of a man he had run down and killed late one night on a lonely suburban street. When he had realized that the man was dead, he had let the body lie and fled. The papers had been full of it for weeks—even to the extent of a sizable reward. And now this!

"No, oh God, no!" whispered Alfred hoarsely; "tell him to go away. I never heard the name before!"

Mr. Addison's deep gray eyes slowly and inexorably pierced the terrified drug addict through and through, till Meyers felt that he had dragged the guilty lie out and was dangling it in plain sight. The small man's form slowly dwindled away, keeping his finger pointed straight at Alfred. The hands were last to go and for a moment they hung palpitating in the air independent of a body. Meyers covered his face with his hands, cowered down in his chair and made a little strangling noise. After a few minutes Mr. Addison went to the windows and raised the blinds, one by one, letting the late afternoon sunlight stream in across the somber room in welcome beams. A far-reaching shaft fell across the inert girl, and for a moment, his fears half forgotten, Alfred gloated on the sight of her with an unholy light in his eyes.

As he stood in the front hall for a moment awaiting Mr. Addison, his eyes, out of force of habit, traveled swiftly over the hall and adjoining room in a practised and appraising glance. He noted the bits of expensive bric-à-brac, a silver vase on the mantel that was a real prize, and a painting on the far wall that might possibly be an original.

And now, in the privacy of his apartment, Alfred took another tiny waxed paper envelope from his cigarette case. Slowly and luxuri-

ously he sniffed every particle of the white powder. For a long time he lay back in his deep armchair, his fingers moving restlessly. By degrees a dull glow began to show deep down in his pale eyes and from time to time his thin lips twitched themselves into a crooked smile. He was thinking of the girl at the seance—Mr. Addison's daughter—thinking of her flowerlike, helpless beauty as she lay limply back in the chair. And Mr. Addison's hands—perfect, well-manicured, yet possessed of the strength of a gorilla. Queer! That daughter of his was a little beauty . . . and the picture hanging at the far end of the front room—might be an original . . . yes, probably was an original and worth a small fortune if properly handled.

Under the influence of a double dose of cocain, Alfred's mind was functioning rapidly and erratically. He thought of the fine furnishings in Mr. Addison's house—a clever worker could make a worthwhile clean-up in that house. The silver vase on the mantel, a little hand-carved ivory lamp and—why, the girl, too!—mustn't overlook her. Oh no, she was better than any of the other loot. Meyers smiled more crookedly than before. He'd see more of that girl! Yes, sir! Pay a call on her soon—very soon. Why, even tonight was not too soon. The outline of her slim, weak figure danced before his eyes and his drug-twisted face lighted up.

As Alfred chuckled and smirked over the thought of the girl, a slightly disturbing thing kept creeping in. Mr. Addison intruded himself here and there in the jumbled-up scenes which flitted through Meyers' mind. First it was his face and reaching arms, then his arms from the elbow down and finally his hands alone, extended; those great tapered fingers of steel opening and closing convulsively. They intruded themselves more and more; they grew to monstrous size; the fine hairs on the back of the fingers seemed the size and coarseness of heavy wire.

In the somewhat muddy state of mind induced by cocain, even the most harrowing thoughts do not seem distinctly unpleasant. Meyers sat bolt-upright on the edge of his chair and regarded the phantom hands of Mr. Addison with a grin. The hands fascinated him. They darted in at his throat, they lay quietly on the table for a moment, then waked into life and crawled slowly about like great sluggish spiders. Finally they came to rest on the floor by Alfred's foot. Deliberately he rose and stepped squarely upon one of them. His foot passed through and seemed imbedded in the vapory form of the hand. Meyers laughed, a dry, mirthless laugh, and leaped, both feet together, on the other one. For a minute or so he devoted himself to trying to destroy the eery things, then gave it up and fell to laughing at them. He stepped to his cigarette case, emptied another waxed envelope and snuffed it up. Then he stood over the hands and glared at them till the drug had taken full effect. The two things on the floor seemed to grow smaller and paler under his gaze till at last they vanished entirely.

Meyers laughed a very satisfied and high-pitched laugh. He stood before the mirror and straightened his tie. He'd tell Mr. Addison about this hand matter, he told himself, and he also wanted to make it clear that the name Roger Kane meant nothing at all to him. Knew too much, that Mr. Addison did! Have to have a good talk with him. Have a talk with the daughter, too. Might as well make it this evening. Yes, he'd go right now.

He pocketed his cigarette case, donned his hat, and walked briskly down the steps of his apartment

house. In the godlike state of exhilaration which is a later, fuller effect of cocain, he covered the four long city blocks to the old brownstone house oblivious of the traffic, the twinkling lights and the jostling crowds. At the door of Mr. Addison's house he rang the bell long and loudly. There was an interval of silence, broken only by the far-off rumble of the avenue. Again he rang. From back in the dark recesses of the old house came the sound of an opened door, footsteps, the click of an electric light switch. The knob turned and Mr. Addison, in dressing gown and slippers, stood in the doorway.

"Want to see you, Mr. Addison," said Meyers gruffly, stepping past the elder man and into the hallway.

"About what?" queried Addison, closing the door and regarding his visitor intently.

Under the merciless gaze of Mr. Addison's blazing gray eyes Meyers invented a falsehood quickly. "I would like to make you an offer on that silver vase you have," he said. "I noticed it this afternoon."

"That vase is not for sale," returned the other.

"Understand, Mr. Addison, that I am a connoisseur of fine things and I am interested in your collection. That picture, for instance——"

"Mr. Meyers, my collection is composed entirely of family heirlooms which money can not buy. My daughter and I had retired for the night when you rang. I have nothing for sale and it is late. Good night!"

He stepped toward the door when a sudden movement on Alfred's part caused him to turn. He leaped back and seized the descending wrist with a grip that bruised the very bone. Meyers made a little animal noise of pain and anger as his blackjack thudded on the floor. As if he were a straw man, Addison jerked Alfred toward the door.

With the tightening of the vise-like grip on his right wrist, something snapped in Meyers' cocain-inflamed brain. With his free hand he jerked a tiny, flat automatic from an armpit pocket, pressed it tight against Addison's chest, and pulled the trigger.

The silencer-equipped little weapon made virtually no report. The terrible grip on Meyers' wrist contracted convulsively as the elder man stood swaying for a few moments. He drew Alfred down with him as he slipped soundlessly to the floor, stone-dead. Meyers struggled to a kneeling position and tore frantically at the steely fingers about his wrist. Half sunken in the crushed flesh, their awful pressure shut off the circulation till Alfred's hand was blue-black and cold as ice. One by one, using all his strength, he bent back the fingers as if escaping from a steel trap. When the death-grip of the last rapidly-cooling finger had been disengaged, Meyers rose to his feet a bit shakily, rubbing his bruised wrist.

For a long time he stood there over the body of his victim, trying to work some of the circulation back into his right hand. About his wrist there was a great purple hand imprint, the overlapping fingers standing out as clearly as if they were painted on the pale skin.

PRESENTLY Meyers began to fumble in his pocket with his left hand. He drew out his cigarette case and with a little maneuvering was able to take another dose of cocain. Under the continued influence of the drug the pupils of his eyes had dilated enormously, seriously affecting his vision. He looked down at the body of the man he had just murdered, but the sight awoke not the

slightest response on his chalky, set face.

Weird and disconnected forms began to race through his drug-riddled brain. Bright lights flashed before his eyes, discordant bells jangled in his ears, and the cords of his neck stood out tensely as he lurched toward the foot of the stairs to support himself on the banister. Gradually a single thought drew apart from the rest—upstairs, somewhere, was the girl he had come to see. When the idea was firmly fixed in his mind, he made his way slowly up the long, winding staircase and stole cautiously down the darkened hall, one hand on the wall.

From a room to the right came the voice of Mr. Addison's daughter. "Is that you, Father?" she called uneasily. Meyers made no answer, but turned into the room whence the voice had come. His fingers found the light switch, and with the flood of illumination which followed he saw the girl half raised in bed, the covers drawn up over her breast and her dark hair streaming down over her bare shoulders. For a moment he stood and leered, then turned and locked the door, depositing the key in his pocket. The girl did not move, but a deep-rooted horror glistened in her wide, dark eyes.

Meyers extended his arm and beckoned drunkenly. The girl shuddered violently. Suddenly she spoke.

"You have killed my father!"

The drug-fiend nodded indifferently and started across the floor toward her. She leaped from her bed and stood, back to the wall, panting with terror.

"Don't touch me!" she said in a low husky voice; "if you touch me I'll kill myself!"

Meyers staggered forward and crushed her to him. Bracing herself against the wall, the girl thrust him violently away. He reeled unsteadily backward, tripped over a low stool and sprawled on the floor. The girl fell back into a chair by the side of her bed. The sheets, which she had been holding about her, by an accidental fling of her arm swept up, caught, and hung from the corner of the high bedstead, forming a long, sweeping drape before her.

As Meyers pulled himself up to a sitting position against the opposite wall, he saw the girl's face quiver violently, then settle into the fixed expression he had noticed that afternoon while she was in the materialization trance. Even as he looked, an angry, twisting, nebulous something sprang out from beneath the draped sheets. It writhed like a cloud of hot vapor. It grew with a breath-taking rapidity, shaping itself in a few moments to the form of a man a trifle under medium height. The figure became more compact and more distinct; it quivered and shook as though under the influence of some mighty emotion. Two blazing, piercing gray eyes shone from the spirit's face, while at the end of its extended arms, fingers clutching the air, were two huge, perfectly-formed, gorilla-strong human hands . . .

Cowering low against the wall, Alfred Meyers watched the hands and the eyes advance on him. He could feel the withering gaze of the awful gray orbs boring into him. The lower part of the spirit's body seemed to grow more indistinct, as though concentrating all its solid matter in those terrible, inexorable hands. On they came, the fingers tense as bars of fine steel, eager to grasp and crush. . .

The burning eyes in the shadowy head were looking down on Meyers. The hands floated, armless, toward his throat. . . Not a muscle did the drug-fiend move as the long, tapered fingers slipped eagerly around his throat. With a crushing, inhuman strength the two mighty

hands strangled Alfred Meyers, the fingers locking solidly around the back of his neck. Slowly his face took on a purplish cast, his eyes protruded glassily from their sockets. . .

Eyes . . . gray eyes . . . huge, clutching hands . . . about his throat . . . roaring in his ears . . . oblivion.

"And neither is it possible for a dead man in the front hall to pass through a locked door upstairs and strangle another man to death, is it now?"

The detective was silent under the coroner's crushing logic. "But," he protested, "there *were* finger-marks on his throat."

"Yes, there were," went on the big coroner in a puzzled tone which he immediately tried to cover up, "but nevertheless, this is an extremely obvious case of over-indulgence in narcotics and as such it will be reported!"

Glaring defiantly at the detective, he closed his note-book with a decisive flip.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

Young Goodman Brown

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

YOUNG Goodman Brown came forth at sunset into the street of Salem village; but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his young wife. And Faith, as the wife was aptly named, thrust her own pretty head into the street, letting the wind play with the pink ribbons of her cap while she called to Goodman Brown.

"Dearest heart," whispered she, softly and rather sadly, when her lips were close to his ear, "prithee put off your journey until sunrise and sleep in your own bed tonight. A lone woman is troubled with such dreams and such thoughts that she's afeard of herself sometimes. Pray tarry with me this night, dear husband, of all nights in the year."

"My love and my Faith," replied young Goodman Brown, "of all nights in the year, this one night must I tarry away from thee. My journey, as thou callest it, forth and back again, must needs be done 'twixt now and sunrise. What, my sweet, pretty wife, dost thou doubt me already, and we but three months married?"

"Then God bless you!" said Faith, with the pink ribbons; "and may you find all well when you come back."

"Amen!" cried Goodman Brown. "Say thy prayers, dear Faith, and go to bed at dusk, and no harm will come to thee."

So they parted; and the young man pursued his way until, being about to turn the corner by the meeting house, he looked back and saw the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air, in spite of her pink ribbons.

"Poor little Faith!" thought he, for his heart smote him. "What a

wretch am I to leave her on such an errand! She talks of dreams, too. Methought as she spoke there was trouble in her face, as if a dream had warned her what work is to be done tonight. But no, no; 'twould kill her to think it. Well, she's a blessed angel on earth; and after this one night I'll cling to her skirts and follow her to heaven."

With this excellent resolve for the future, Goodman Brown felt himself justified in making more haste on his present evil purpose. He had taken a dreary road, darkened by all the gloomiest trees of the forest, which barely stood aside to let the narrow path creep through, and closed immediately behind. It was all as lonely as could be; and there is this peculiarity in such a solitude, that the traveler knows not who may be concealed by the innumerable trunks and the thick boughs overhead; so that with lonely footsteps he may yet be passing through an unseen multitude.

"There may be a devilish Indian behind every tree," said Goodman Brown to himself; and he glanced fearfully behind him as he added, "What if the devil himself should be at my very elbow!"

His head being turned back, he passed a crook of the road, and, looking forward again, beheld the figure of a man, in grave and decent attire, seated at the foot of an old tree. He arose at Goodman Brown's approach and walked onward side by side with him.

"You are late, Goodman Brown," said he. "The clock of the Old South was striking as I came through Boston; and that is full fifteen minutes agone."

"Faith kept me back a while," replied the young man, with a tremor in his voice, caused by the sudden appearance of his companion, though not wholly unexpected.

It was now deep dusk in the forest, and deepest in that part of it where these two were journeying. As nearly as could be discerned, the second traveler was about fifty years old, apparently in the same rank of life as Goodman Brown, and bearing a considerable resemblance to him, though perhaps more in expression than features. Still they might have been taken for father and son. And yet, though the elder person was as simply clad as the younger and as simple in manner, too, he had an indescribable air of one who knew the world, and who would not have felt abashed at the governor's dinner table or in King William's court, were it possible that his affairs should call him thither. But the only thing about him that could be fixed upon as remarkable was his staff, which bore the likeness of a great black snake, so curiously wrought that it might almost be seen to twist and wriggle itself like a living serpent.

"Come, Goodman Brown," cried his fellow-traveler, "this is a dull pace for the beginning of a journey. Take my staff, if you are weary."

"Friend," said the other, exchanging his slow pace for a full stop, "having kept covenant by meeting thee here, it is my purpose now to return whence I came. I have scruples touching the matter."

"Sayest thou so?" replied he of the serpent, smiling apart. "Let us walk on, nevertheless, reasoning as we go; and if I convince thee not thou shalt turn back. We are but a little way in the forest yet."

"Too far! too far!" exclaimed the good man, unconsciously resuming his walk. "My father never went into the woods on such an errand, nor his father before him. We have been a race of honest men and good Christians since the days of the martyrs; and shall I be the first of the name of Brown that ever took this path and kept——"

"Such company, thou wouldst say," observed the elder person, interpreting his pause. "Well said, Goodman Brown! I have been as well acquainted with your family as with ever a one among the Puritans; and that's no trifle to say. I helped your grandfather, the constable, when he lashed the Quaker woman so smartly through the streets of Salem; and it was I that brought your father a pitch-pine knot, kindled at my own hearth, to set fire to an Indian village, in King Philip's war. They were my good friends, both; and many a pleasant walk have we had along this path, and returned merrily after midnight. I would fain be friends with you for their sake."

"If it be as thou sayest," replied Goodman Brown, "I marvel they never spoke of these matters; or, verily, I marvel not, seeing that the least rumor of the sort would have driven them from New England. We are a people of prayer, and good works to boot, and abide no such wickedness."

"Wickedness or not," said the traveler with the twisted staff, "I have a very general acquaintance here in New England. The deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the selectmen of divers towns make me their chairman; and a majority of the Great and General Court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too—but these are state secrets."

"Can this be so?" cried Goodman Brown, with a stare of amazement at his undisturbed companion. "Howbeit, I have nothing to do with the governor and council; they have their own ways, and are no rule for a simple husbandman like me. But, were I to go on with thee, how should I meet the eye of that good old man, our minister, at Salem village? Oh, his voice would make me tremble both Sabbath day and lecture day."

Thus far the elder traveler had listened with due gravity; but now burst into a fit of irrepressible mirth, shaking himself so violently that his snakelike staff actually seemed to wriggle in sympathy.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted he again and again; then composing himself, "Well, go on, Goodman Brown, go on; but, prithee, don't kill me with laughing."

"Well, then, to end the matter at once," said Goodman Brown, considerably nettled, "there is my wife. It would break her dear little heart; and I'd rather break my own."

"Nay, if that be the case," answered the other, "e'en go thy ways, Goodman Brown. I would not for twenty old women like the one hobbling before us that Faith should come to any harm."

As he spoke, he pointed his staff at a female figure on the path, in whom Goodman Brown recognized a very pious and exemplary dame, who had taught him his catechism in youth, and was still his moral and spiritual adviser, jointly with the minister and Deacon Gookin.

"A marvel, truly, that Goody Cloyse should be so far in the wilderness at nightfall," said he. "But, with your leave, friend, I shall take a cut through the woods until we have left this Christian woman behind. Being a stranger to you, she might ask whom I was consorting with and whither I was going."

"Be it so," said his fellow-traveler. "Betake you to the woods, and let me keep the path."

Accordingly the young man turned aside, but took care to watch his companion, who advanced softly along the road until he had come within a staff's length of the old dame. She, meanwhile, was making the best of her way, with singular speed for so aged a woman, and

mumbling some indistinct words—a prayer, doubtless—as she went. The traveler put forth his staff and touched her withered neck with what seemed the serpent's tail.

"The devil!" screamed the pious old lady.

"Then Goody Cloyse knows her old friend?" observed the traveler, confronting her and leaning on his writhing stick.

"Ah, forsooth, and is it your worship indeed?" cried the good dame. "Yea, truly is it, and in the very image of my old gossip, Goodman Brown, the grandfather of the silly fellow that now is. But—would your worship believe it?—my broomstick hath strangely disappeared, stolen, as I suspect, by that unhanged witch, Goody Cory, and that, too, when I was all anointed with the juice of smallage, and cinquefoil, and wolf's-bane——"

"Mingled with fine wheat and the fat of a new-born babe," said the shape of old Goodman Brown.

"Ah, your worship knows the recipe," cried the old lady, cackling aloud. "So, as I was saying, being all ready for the meeting, and no horse to ride on, I made up my mind to foot it; for they tell me there is a nice young man to be taken into communion tonight. But now your good worship will lend me your arm, and we shall be there in a twinkling."

"That can hardly be," answered her friend. "I may not spare you my arm, Goody Cloyse; but here is my staff, if you will."

So saying, he threw it down at her feet, where, perhaps, it assumed life, being one of the rods which its owner had formerly lent to the Egyptian magi. Of this fact, however, Goodman Brown could not take cognizance. He had cast up his eyes in astonishment, and, looking down again, beheld neither Goody Cloyse nor the serpentine staff, but his fellow-traveler alone, who waited for him calmly.

"That old woman taught me my catechism," said the young man; and there was a world of meaning in this simple comment.

They continued to walk onward, while the elder traveler exhorted his companion to make good speed and persevere in the path, discoursing so aptly that his arguments seemed rather to spring up in the bosom of his auditor than to be suggested by himself. As they went, he plucked a branch of maple to serve for a walking stick, and began to strip it of the twigs and little boughs, which were wet with evening dew. The moment his fingers touched them they became strangely withered and dried up as with a week's sunshine. Thus the pair proceeded, at a good free pace, until suddenly, in a gloomy hollow of the road, Goodman Brown sat himself down on the stump of a tree and refused to go any farther.

"Friend," said he, stubbornly, "my mind is made up. Not another step will I budge on this errand. What if a wretched old woman do choose to go to the devil when I thought she was going to heaven: is that any reason why I should quit my dear Faith and go after her?"

"You will think better of this by and by," said his acquaintance, composedly. "Sit here and rest yourself a while; and when you feel like moving again, there is my staff to help you along."

Without more words, he threw his companion the maple stick, and was speedily out of sight as if he had vanished into the deepening gloom. The young man sat a few moments by the roadside, applauding himself greatly, and thinking with how clear a conscience he should meet the minister in his morning walk, nor shrink from the eye of good old Deacon

Gookin. And what calm sleep would be his that very night, which was to have been spent so wickedly, but so purely and sweetly now, in the arms of Faith! Amidst these pleasant and praiseworthy meditations, Goodman Brown heard the tramp of horses along the road, and deemed it advisable to conceal himself within the verge of the forest, conscious of the guilty purpose that had brought him thither, though now so happily turned from it.

On came the hoof tramps and the voices of the riders, two grave old voices, conversing soberly as they drew near. These mingled sounds appeared to pass along the road, within a few yards of the young man's hiding place; but, owing doubtless to the depth of the gloom at that particular spot, neither the travelers nor their steeds were visible. Though their figures brushed the small boughs by the wayside, it could not be seen that they intercepted, even for a moment, the faint gleam from the strip of bright sky athwart which they must have passed. Goodman Brown alternately crouched and stood on tiptoe, pulling aside the branches and thrusting forth his head as far as he durst without discerning so much as a shadow. It vexed him the more, because he could have sworn, were such a thing possible, that he recognized the voices of the minister and Deacon Gookin, jogging along quietly, as they were wont to do, when bound to some ordination or ecclesiastical council. While yet within hearing, one of the riders stopped to pluck a switch.

"Of the two, reverend sir," said the voice like the deacon's, "I had rather miss an ordination dinner than tonight's meeting. They tell me that some of our community are to be here from Falmouth and beyond, and others from Connecticut and Rhode Island, besides several of the Indian powwows, who, after their fashion, know almost as much deviltry as the best of us. Moreover, there is a goodly young woman to be taken into communion."

"Mighty well, Deacon Gookin!" replied the solemn old tones of the minister. "Spur up, or we shall be late. Nothing can be done, you know, until I get on the ground."

The hoofs clattered again; and the voices, talking so strangely in the empty air, passed on through the forest, where no church had ever been gathered or solitary Christian prayed. Whither, then, could these holy men be journeying so deep into the heathen wilderness? Young Goodman Brown caught hold of a tree for support, being ready to sink down on the ground, faint and overburdened with the heavy sickness of his heart. He looked up to the sky, doubting whether there really was a heaven above him. Yet there was the blue arch, and the stars brightening in it.

"With heaven above and Faith below, I will yet stand firm against the devil!" cried Goodman Brown.

While he still gazed upward into the deep arch of the firmament and had lifted his hands to pray, a cloud, though no wind was stirring, hurried across the zenith and hid the brightening stars. The blue sky was still visible except directly overhead, where this black mass of cloud was sweeping swiftly northward. Aloft in the air, as if from the depth of the cloud, came a confused and doubtful sound of voices. Once the listener fancied that he could distinguish the accents of townspeople of his own, men and women, both pious and ungodly, many of whom he had met at the communion table, and had seen others rioting at the tavern. The next moment, so indistinct were the sounds, he doubted whether he had heard aught but the murmur of the old forest, whisper-

ing without a wind. Then came a stronger swell of those familiar tones, heard daily in the sunshine at Salem village, but never until now from a cloud of night. There was one voice, of a young woman, uttering lamentations, yet with an uncertain sorrow, and entreating for some favor, which, perhaps, it would grieve her to obtain; and all the unseen multitude, both saints and sinners, seemed to encourage her onward.

"Faith!" shouted Goodman Brown, in a voice of agony and desperation; and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying, "Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness.

The cry of grief, rage, terror was yet piercing the night, when the unhappy husband held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately in a louder murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the clear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.

"My Faith is gone!" cried he, after one stupefied moment. "There is no good on earth; and sin is but a name. Come, devil; for to thee is this world given."

And, maddened with despair, so that he laughed loud and long, did Goodman Brown grasp his staff and set forth again, at such a rate that he seemed to fly along the forest path rather than to walk or run. The road grew wilder and drearier and more faintly traced, and vanished at length, leaving him in the heart of the dark wilderness, still rushing onward with the instinct that guides mortal man to evil. The whole forest was peopled with frightful sounds—the creaking of the trees, the howling of wild beasts, and the yell of Indians; while sometimes the wind tolled like a distant church bell, and sometimes gave a broad road around the traveler, as if all Nature were laughing him to scorn. But he was himself the chief horror of the scene, and shrank not from its other horrors.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared Goodman Brown when the wind laughed at him. "Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your deviltry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powwow, come devil himself, and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fears you."

In truth, all through the haunted forest there could be nothing more frightful than the figure of Goodman Brown. On he flew among the black pines, brandishing his staff with frenzied gestures, now giving vent to an inspiration of horrid blasphemy, and now shouting forth such laughter as set all the echoes of the forest laughing like demons around him. The fiend in his own shape is less hideous than when he rages in the breast of man. Thus sped the demoniac on his course, until, quivering among the trees, he saw a red light before him, as when the felled trunks and branches of a clearing have been set on fire, and throw up their lurid blaze against the sky, at the hour of midnight. He paused, in a lull of the tempest that had driven him onward, and heard the swell of what seemed a hymn, rolling solemnly from a distance with the weight of many voices. He knew the tune; it was a familiar one in the choir of the village meeting house. The verse died heavily away, and was lengthened by a chorus, not of human voices, but of all the sounds of the benighted wilderness pealing in awful harmony together. Goodman Brown cried out; and his

cry was lost to his own ear by its unison with the cry of the desert.

In the interval of silence he stole forward until the light glared full upon his eyes. At one extremity of an open space, hemmed in by the dark wall of the forest, arose a rock bearing some rude, natural resemblance either to an altar or a pulpit, and surrounded by four blazing pines, their tops aflame, their stems untouched, like candles at an evening meeting. The mass of foliage that had overgrown the summit of the rock was all on fire, blazing high into the night and fitfully illuminating the whole field. Each pendent twig and leafy festoon was in a blaze. As the red light rose and fell, a numerous congregation alternately shone forth, then disappeared in shadow, and again grew, as it were, out of the darkness, peopling the heart of the solitary woods at once.

"A grave and dark-clad company," quoth Goodman Brown.

In truth they were such. Among them, quivering to and fro between gloom and splendor, appeared faces that would be seen next day at the council board of the province, and others which, Sabbath after Sabbath, looked devoutly heavenward, and benignantly over the crowded pews, from the holiest pulpits in the land. Some affirm that the lady of the governor was there. At least there were high dames well known to her, and wives of honored husbands, and widows, a great multitude, and ancient maidens, all of excellent repute, and fair young girls, who trembled lest their mothers should espy them. Either the sudden gleams of light flashing over the obscure field bedazzled Goodman Brown, or he recognized a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity. Good old Deacon Gookin had arrived, and waited at the skirts of that venerable saint, his revered pastor. But, irreverently consorting with these grave, reputable, and pious people, these elders of the church, these chaste dames and dewy virgins, there were men of dissolute lives and women of spotted fame, wretches given over to all mean and filthy vice, and suspected even of horrid crimes. It was strange to see that the good shrank not from the wicked, nor were the sinners abashed by the saints. Scattered also among their palefaced enemies were the Indian priests, or powwows, who had often scared their native forest with more hideous incantations than any known to English witchcraft.

"But where is Faith?" thought Goodman Brown, and, as hope came into his heart, he trembled.

Another verse of the hymn arose, a slow and mournful strain, such as the pious love, but joined to words which expressed all that our nature can conceive of sin, and darkly hinted at far more. Unfathomable to mere mortals is the lore of fiends. Verse after verse was sung; and still the chorus of the desert swelled between like the deepest tone of a mighty organ; and with the final peal of that dreadful anthem there came a sound, as if the roaring wind, the rushing streams, the howling beasts, and every other voice of the unconverted wilderness were mingling and according with the voice of guilty man in homage to the prince of all. The four blazing pines threw up a loftier flame, and obscurely discovered shapes and visages of horror on the smoke wreaths above the impious assembly. At the same moment the fire on the rock shot redly forth and formed a glowing arch above its base, where now appeared a figure. With reverence be it spoken, the figure bore no slight similitude, both in garb and manner, to some grave divine of the New England churches.

"Bring forth the converts!" cried a voice that echoed through the field and rolled into the forest.

At the word, Goodman Brown stepped forth from the shadow of the trees and approached the congregation, with whom he felt a loathful brotherhood by the sympathy of all that was wicked in his heart. He could have well-nigh sworn that the shape of his own dead father beckoned him to advance, looking downward from a smoke wreath, while a woman, with dim features of despair, threw out her hand to warn him back. Was it his mother? But he had no power to retreat one step, nor to resist, even in thought, when the minister and good old Deacon Gookin seized his arms and led him to the blazing rock. Thither came also the slender form of a veiled female, led between Goody Cloyse, that pious teacher of the catechism, and Martha Carrier, who had received the devil's promise to be queen of hell. A rampant hag was she. And there stood the proselytes beneath the canopy of fire.

"Welcome, my children," said the dark figure, "to the communion of your race. Ye have found thus young your nature and your destiny. My children, look behind you!"

They turned; and flashing forth, as it were, in a sheet of flame, the fiend-worshipers were seen; the smile of welcome gleamed darkly on every visage.

"There," resumed the sable form, "are all whom ye have reverenced from youth. Ye deemed them holier than yourselves, and shrank from your own sin, contrasting it with their lives of righteousness and prayerful aspirations heavenward. Yet here are they all in my worshiping assembly. This night it shall be granted you to know their secret deeds; how hoary-bearded elders of the church have whispered wanton words to the young maids of their households; how many a woman, eager for widows' weeds, has given her husband a drink at bedtime and let him sleep his last sleep in her bosom; how beardless youths have made haste to inherit their fathers' wealth; and how fair damsels—blush not, sweet ones—have dug little graves in the garden, and bidden me, the sole guest, to an infant's funeral. By the sympathy of your human hearts for sin ye shall scent out all the places—whether in church, bedchamber, street, field, or forest—where crime has been committed, and shall exult to behold the whole earth one stain of guilt, one mighty blood-spot. Far more than this. It shall be yours to penetrate, in every bosom, the deep mystery of sin, the fountain of all wicked arts, which inexhaustibly supplies more evil impulses than human power—than my power at its utmost—can make manifest in deeds. And now, my children, look upon each other."

They did so; and, by the blaze of the hell-kindled torches, the wretched man beheld his Faith, and the wife her husband, trembling before that unhallowed altar.

"Lo, there ye stand, my children," said the figure, in a deep and solemn tone, almost sad with its despairing awfulness, as if his once angelic nature could yet mourn for our miserable race. "Depending upon one another's hearts, ye had still hoped that virtue were not all a dream. Now are ye undeceived. Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your only happiness. Welcome again, my children, to the communion of your race."

"Welcome," repeated the fiend-worshipers, in one cry of despair and triumph.

And there they stood, the only pair, as it seemed, who were yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness in this dark world. A basin was

hollowed, naturally, in the rock. Did it contain water, reddened by the lurid light? or was it blood? or, perchance, a liquid flame? Herein did the shape of evil dip his hand and prepare to lay the mark of baptism upon their foreheads, that they might be partakers of the mystery of sin, more conscious of the secret guilt of others, both in deed and thought, than they could now be of their own. The husband cast one look at his pale wife, and Faith at him. What polluted wretches would the next glance show them to each other, shuddering alike at what they disclosed and what they saw!

"Faith! Faith!" cried the husband, "look up to heaven, and resist the wicked one."

Whether Faith obeyed, he knew not. Hardly had he spoken when he found himself amid calm night and solitude, listening to a roar of the wind which died heavily away through the forest. He staggered against the rock, and felt it chill and damp; while a hanging twig, that had been all on fire, besprinkled his cheek with the coldest dew.

The next morning young Goodman Brown came slowly into the street of Salem village, staring around him like a bewildered man. The good old minister was taking a walk along the graveyard to get an appetite for breakfast and meditate his sermon, and bestowed a blessing, as he passed, on Goodman Brown. He shrank from the venerable saint as if to avoid an anathema. Old Deacon Gookin was at domestic worship, and the holy words of his prayer were heard through the open window. "What God doth the wizard pray to?" quoth Goodman Brown. Goody Cloyse, that excellent old Christian, stood in the early sunshine at her own lattice, catechizing a little girl who had brought her a pint of morning's milk. Goodman Brown snatched away the child as from the grasp of the fiend himself. Turning the corner by the meeting house, he spied the head of Faith, with the pink ribbons, gazing anxiously forth, and bursting into such joy at sight of him that she skipped along the street and almost kissed her husband before the whole village. But Goodman Brown looked sternly and sadly into her face, and passed on without a greeting.

Had Goodman Brown fallen asleep in the forest and only dreamed a wild dream of a witch meeting?

Be it so, if you will; but, alas! it was a dream of evil omen for young Goodman Brown. A stern, a sad, a darkly meditative, a distrustful, if not a desperate, man did he become from the night of that fearful dream. On the Sabbath day, when the congregation was singing a holy psalm, he could not listen, because an anthem of sin rushed loudly upon his ear and drowned all the blessed strain. When the minister spoke from the pulpit, with power and fervid eloquence and with his hand on the open Bible, of the sacred truths of our religion, and of saint-like lives and triumphant deaths, and of future bliss or misery unutterable, then did Goodman Brown turn pale, dreading lest the roof should thunder down upon the gray blasphemer and his hearers. Often, awaking suddenly at midnight, he shrank from the bosom of Faith; and at morning or eventide, when the family knelt down at prayer, he scowled, and muttered to himself, and gazed sternly at his wife, and turned away. And when he had lived long, and was borne to his grave, a hoary corpse, followed by Faith, an aged woman, and children and grandchildren, a goodly procession, besides neighbors not a few, they carved no hopeful verse upon his tombstone; for his dying hour was gloom.

WEIRD TALES is now four years old. When it first appeared on the news stands, many thought it was "just another magazine," but it was soon discovered that WEIRD TALES was a "different" magazine, with a wholesome disregard for the self-imposed editorial limitations of other publications. The fantastic monsters of ancient legend stalked through its pages; werewolves lived again; ghosts and apparitions took on modern trappings; specters wailed in haunted houses; and scientists performed weird experiments in their laboratories. Magazine pages were again opened to the rich literature of the bizarre and fantastic, and with the return of weird fiction to the news stands came the new literature, of which WEIRD TALES is the foremost exponent—the weird-scientific story. The forward leap that science has taken in the last fifty years has stimulated the imaginations of authors, and in the pages of WEIRD TALES the future of the world is rolled back, the void of Space is peopled with flying ships, which can go backward and forward in Time as well as Space; mad scientists strive to destroy the world; tremendous dooms rush in upon the Earth from the sky.

The amazing success of WEIRD TALES has been built upon three types of stories—the weird tale proper; the bizarre and fantastic story; and the weird-scientific story. That these types of stories, which take one away from the humdrum environment of everyday life, are appreciated by the reading public is shown by the steady growth of WEIRD TALES. We shall continue to give you the kind of stories we have given you in the past. And if you like these stories, if you want to aid in building up an even greater success for your magazine, you can do so by calling the attention of your friends to the feast of imaginative reading it contains and letting them share the good things therein.

The Rev. Henry S. Whitehead, himself an author of note, writes: "Congratulations on the March issue. I think Lovecraft has struck twelve with *The White Ship*. It is one of the finest things of its sort I have ever seen. It is literature."

Harold S. Farnese, of Los Angeles, writes to The Eyrie: "As to the pro and con of reprints, I think it ludicrous to generally praise or condemn them. You have given us some very good reprints, notably *What Was It?* and *The Upper Berth;* also the two last ones were entertaining. The one by Andreyeff shows the hand of a masterly author; it affected me strangely days after I read it. But *Ligeia* by Poe was awfully drawn out, almost pointless, pages of ravings over the beauty of a certain woman, exhausting the dictionary, as it were,

but stylistically old-fashioned and uninteresting. Give us reprints, but when you select them be guided by their style. Some of the old stories read as if they had been written only yesterday, but others assuredly bore us to death. The days of the great Walter Scott, who was permitted to describe a hillside through sixty pages or so, are over. We want action these days, not long-winded descriptions."

"You may say what you wish about the reprints," writes John D. Howell, of Lawrenceville, New Jersey, "but you can hardly give a stronger argument for them than *Lazarus* in the March issue. On the other hand, Hawthorne's stories are as good an argument against them. Hawthorne writes well, but his weird stories contain too much moralizing."

And yet as many readers voted against *Lazarus* as voted for it!

John R. Springfield, of Philadelphia, writes to The Eyrie: "*Mordieu*, but WEIRD TALES is *La Magazine Magnifique!* When a story makes me go four stops past my station while going to work I am ready to give it due credit. Jules de Grandin and Seabury Quinn should become synonymous with the immortal Poe. Long live both of them! It is not often that I 'rave' over a magazine, but the February issue has my recommendation for the Nobel Prize in weird literature. *The Man Who Cast No Shadow, The Atomic Conquerors,* and *Drome*—what more could one individual, no matter who he be, want to keep him on pins and needles? All this is in addition to a superb reprint: Washington Irving's *The Lady in the Velvet Collar.* It is a seventh heaven, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Writes Gerald C. Hamm, of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania: "I wish to congratulate you on your thrilling serial, *Drome.* I have been a constant reader of your magazine for two years now and I have never yet read a story so breath-taking and weird as *Drome.* The writer, John Martin Leahy, is an artist and a master of weird tales. The story keeps one in suspense until one can not wait until the next issue of your magazine."

Donat De Lisle, of Montreal, Canada, writes to The Eyrie: "I have been reading your wonderful magazine nearly two years. I am an orchestra leader in Montreal's most popular cabaret, and I am glad to mention that every man in the band is a constant reader of WEIRD TALES. I hope you will give us more stories by Seabury Quinn, who is my favorite author."

Writes Stephen Bagby, of New York City: "Let me congratulate you, as a reader of WEIRD TALES, for the making of such an excellent magazine. That you are doing a good job is attested by its increasing popularity in New York. It is easy to understand why WEIRD TALES is capturing readers, since the 'tired business man' today is bored to death with humdrum reading matter. He wants something to make him 'sit up and take notice,' and that is what WEIRD TALES does. Ordinary story magazines are tame, in comparison. More power to you! For four years I have been a sort of unofficial missionary for WEIRD TALES, especially among newspaper men, and have found making steady readers easy. It is only necessary to let them read it once, and they're waiting at the news stands for the next issue."

Mrs. Molly Smith, of Akron, Ohio, writes: "Please *do* publish more genuine ghost stories and those of werewolves. Keep WEIRD TALES *WEIRD.*"

Writes Roland Jackson Hunter, of Denver, Colorado: "In The Eyrie you ask your readers if they wish you to continue the policy of including a reprint in each number. There are so many good old stories with weird manner and bizarre themes that I do not think one a month is too many. But if any considerable number of your readers disagree with me, I suggest that

you publish reprints at intervals of two months rather than abandon them altogether."

"Hello, Eyrie," writes Will T. Heideman, of New Ulm, Minnesota. "Say, folks, you know all about how a hypnotist can cast a spell over you and all that stuff. Well, that's just how I find WEIRD TALES. After I had read my first copy of it, over a year ago, the spell first fell on me. I couldn't keep from getting the magazine every month; and unlike other magazines I read every single one of the stories in each copy."

Here comes a knock, flavored with a prefatory boost: "Your stories always have been incomparable in the wonders of imagination," writes Mrs. N. Large, of Eugene, Oregon, "but *Soul-Catcher*, in the March issue, was, to me, an incredibly childish tale. There was no object to the story—in fact no excuse for its being written. If the writer had gone on and told *why* the doctor captured those souls he might have made a story. If the surgeon had captured the souls in order to people a universe of his own, in order to send them back into animals to study the outcome or had hoped to teach these souls in some manner and send them into the other world to learn there and return to him, imparting their information—in other words, using them as a connecting link between the outer world and ourselves, we would have been treated to a mighty interesting story."

Ross L. Bralley, of Tulsa, Oklahoma, asks: "Why can't we have an authors' contest in which the most popular author would be awarded a prize, popularity to be determined by vote of the readers? I'll say here that in my opinion your two best authors are Seabury Quinn and Edmond Hamilton. The latter can write some of the most outlandish scientific stories and make you think you are reading the truth."

Readers, your favorite story in the March issue, as shown by your votes, is *The City of Glass*, by Joel Martin Nichols, Jr., which was closely pressed for first honors by Edmond Hamilton's *Evolution Island*. What is your favorite story in this issue?

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Coming soon in WEIRD TALES

The Master of Doom

(Continued from page 600)

tors knew—that there was any other land on the globe. Finally our spies landed secretly on the northern border of what is called the First Region. It was then a barren waste, though now it is a place of exile for enemies of the Master. Years went by, with many secret expeditions, before they could get a full knowledge of what had happened. After that, the efforts of everyone in the New America were bent to overcoming those inhuman beings who ruled the Earthband.

"Aviation was developed to the utmost, for that was the Master's weak point. Vertical control—what was called helicopter control in your time—is now used in all our flying machines. Our inventors and scientists have perfected hundreds of other things which have aided the cause. Voice projection, which I used in demanding your surrender, is one of them. At last we felt sure the Earthband would be helpless to defend itself when we attacked. We even made one or two practise flights here, on dark nights when we would not be seen. Our spies selected tonight as the best time to attack, for all the counselors and officials were to be at the Palace. And we have succeeded, for our men are sure to capture them within a few hours."

As he concluded his story, the leader smiled quietly down at Betty and Graham, who were listening in a daze.

"I know it will take some time to appreciate these many changes that time has made," he said gently. "But we shall help you—and we shall need your help in rebuilding the lives of these unfortunate regionites."

(Continued on page 716)

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(Continued from page 714)

"Then you will not harm them?" asked Betty, tremulously. "There has been so much bloodshed——"

The leader shook his head, and the sternness had entirely disappeared from his face.

"They were not to blame. We shall help them—though it will be the work of years. The old regime is gone forever. The counselors will be imprisoned, for in the New America we do not punish by death; but they will soon pass away when their artificial life-stimulus is taken from them."

He turned to his aides and gave a brief order. Then he beckoned to Latta and Rosita.

"Come with us, for we need guides who can explain our purpose to these people. Later, we shall send you back to your friends here, but in a short time you will all join us at our headquarters."

They went out quickly, the blond giants marching in serene confidence of their power, the two regionites exchanging shy glances of adoration.

Left thus alone, the two who had lived to see the saving of a lost world looked for a long moment into each other's eyes. Then, somewhat unsteadily, Graham got to his feet, despite the girl's protest. Slowly, hand in hand, they passed from that chamber of death, with not a backward glance at the pitiful thing which had dared oppose its Maker.

As they reached the windows the golden moon shone tranquilly down upon them, creating a soft halo about the girl's wondrous hair. And then it was that Graham leaned down to whisper something to her. Betty's lips trembled for a second, then she smiled with all her archness of old.

"I never thought—way back there in Guam—I would have to wait five hundred years for you to ask me that."

The Man Who Lost His Luck

(Continued from page 620)

"Did you not know that it was on the right side of your body? It is one of the rarest things in pathology, isn't it? I have seen two cases in thirty years of practise and neither survived to adolescence. Surely you knew!"

Yes, I had known. This was the secret that I had put out of thought and mind.

"How long do you give me?" I asked.

"Four weeks," he answered.

The blow had fallen. I was to taste the lees at last. For days I wrestled with my despair. And at last I thought of Brodsky. I went to his house. He waited for me, as it seemed to me; he greeted me with a chilling smile.

"Give me back my ill luck!" I cried desperately. "What does all my success avail me now that I have to die?"

"You are asking the impossible," the doctor answered.

"But it is you who changed the current of my life," I pleaded wildly. "Surely you can undo this thing! Give me poverty," I raved. "Take away everything that I possess —money and reputation; let me be the meanest wretch that crawls along the waterfront, but let me live."

"You are asking the impossible," said Brodsky again. "You have received all that life had to offer you; you have drawn to the last penny upon the bank of fortune, and you must reap as you have sown. There is no refuge."

I hung my head in shame. "Would to God that I had been content with what was given me!" I muttered in anguish.

"Besides," Brodsky went on, "I

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warned you not to let go that bar and in a few moments it will burn your fingers. Drop it!" He snapped his fingers sharply in my face. And suddenly a cloud seemed to roll away from before my gaze. I stared around me; around the office, down at my clothes, up into the smiling face of the doctor. The bar had grown thin and weighed no more than a feather. It fell from between my fingers; it was the match which I had struck to light my cigar, and the flames were spreading toward the end. I had lived through two years of life in a period of ten or twelve seconds. I saw the doctor watching my face curiously.

"Well," he said, "do you still want to draw upon the bank of fortune?"

"It was a dream?" I cried. "Was none of it real?—the electrical machine, the luck, the fame I achieved—was none of it real?"

"Happily not," said Brodsky smiling. "It was hardly a dream; it was a little experiment in hypnotics, during the course of which I projected into your mind a few random ideas that came into my own. See," he added, to dispel the remnants of my vision, "your coat buttons are still on the right side, and if you put your hand beneath them you will not feel your heart pulsating.

"I could, perhaps, have brought to bear psychical powers to bring you that luck from which you begged to be released, but there is a simpler way. I want a secretary to help me with my work. Will you accept the post? It will afford you ample time to resume your medical practise, and, if you will be my guest until you get upon your feet again, I am sure that your financial and domestic difficulties will soon have become things of the past."

NOTE.—The next story in this series, "The Dream That Came True," will be printed in WEIRD TALES next month.

The Black Castle

(Continued from page 677)

hand moved toward a piece of parchment before him.

"So, Monsieur, you think you have thwarted me. Your imagination plays you pretty tricks; you have killed your son because of them. I, Monsieur, have never left the ether, and yet I have my vengeance. But, Monsieur, if you think for one moment that you have escaped your death tonight, you delude yourself, for die tonight you will!"

The count stared at what had been written and a cold perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

Outside the storm raged furiously. The count tore the parchment into pieces and scattered them upon the floor. He ran to the window and shook his fist at the sky and cursed the God who had made him. And, as if in answer to that curse, the clouds parted and a streak of lightning reached out toward him.

From the village below, the people saw the lightning strike the castle. They saw a turret crumble to ruins and come crashing down the steep cliff to the plain, and heard a terrible cry echo and re-echo through the night.

And some affirm to this day that they heard very distinctly a mocking laugh carried along by the wind above the roar of the gale.

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NEXT MONTH

A Suitor From the Shades

By GREYE LA SPINA

THE story of a jealous lover who reached back from the grave to blight the happiness of his sweetheart, using the life forces of a frail girl to materialize himself. Told by the author of "Fettered" and "The Gargoyle," this ghost-story novelette has a strength and appeal that make it extremely fascinating.

A HUMAN, touching story, with plenty of thrills. This is not the old-fashioned ghost-story, for in this tale the malignant ghost of the dead lover is made to seem real and potent, and so plausible is the apparition that the story seems true—and therefore it grips the reader as the chimerical fantasies of the usual ghost-tale can not possibly do. The story will be printed complete

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The Veiled Prophetess

(Continued from page 614)

holly. Then she calls me. Had it been the real Naîra in the flesh, she could have stepped over the holly, but her projection, being spirit—and evil spirit, at that—was powerless to move. Also, my friend, I well knew that if I did but keep that spiritual seeming of the real Naîra away from her body until the crowing of the cock it might have great difficulty in returning to its habitation, and would, perhaps, be forced to wander forever through space. The flesh of Madame Naîra would, as we say, die, for there would be no spirit to animate it.

"Therefore, I was in position to bargain with her, to force her to give back the ring she stole by trick from the young Penneman and to quit the house and the lives of those young people forevermore."

"But why didn't you keep her in the holly circle, if what you say is true?" I asked. "Surely, she would be better dead."

"What!" he demanded. "And leave her evil spirit, freed from the bonds of flesh, to walk the earth by night? Not I, my friend. In the flesh she had certain restrictions; dying a natural death she shall probably return to that unpleasant place from whence she came; but had I torn her from her body by force, she would have still held the young Penneman beneath her spell, and that would have meant death, or worse, for him. No, my friend, I did act for the best, I assure you.

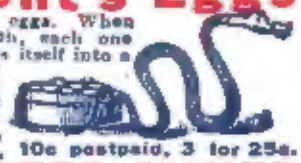
"Br-r-r-r!" he shivered and pulled a comic face as I brought the car to a stop before my door. "I do still shake like a little wet dog from that experience when she stole my coat, Friend Trowbridge," he announced. "Come, a long drink of your so excellent sherry before we go to bed! It will start the blood to flowing through my frozen veins once more."

LUMINOUS PAINT

Make Your Watches, Clocks, Etc., Visible by Night

The very latest discovery in the scientific world. Hitherto, practically unobtainable except at an exorbitant price, we have at last succeeded in producing this remarkable LUMINOUS PAINT, which, applied to the surface of any article, **emits rays of white light, rendering it perfectly visible** in the dark. **THE DARKER THE NIGHT, THE MORE BRILLIANT IT SHINES.** Quite simple to use. Anyone—you can do it. A little applied to the dial of your watch or clock will enable you to tell the time by night. You can coat the push buttons or switch plates of your electric lights, match boxes, and innumerable other articles; make your own Luminous Crucifixes, Luminous Rosaries, etc. Small bottle, **price 25c.** Larger **sizes, 50c and $1** postpaid. **JOHNSON SMITH & CO. Dept. 710, RACINE, WIS.**

Serpent's Eggs



Box contains 12 eggs. When lit with a match, each one gradually hatches itself into a snake several feet long, which curls and twists about in a most life-like manner. **Price per box, 10c postpaid, 3 for 25c.**

CIGARETTE MAKER

Roll your own and save money. Makes them better and quicker besides saving more than half. Use your favorite brand of tobacco. Neat, useful and handy. Pocket size, weighs ½ oz. Made entirely of metal, nickel-plated. **Price 25c postpaid.**

MIDGET BIBLE

GREAT CURIOSITY Smallest Bible in the World. Size of a postage stamp. **200 Pages.** Said to bring good luck to the owner. A genuine work of art. Must be seen to be appreciated. Make good money selling them to friends, church acquaintances, etc. PRICE **15c** each, **3** for **40c**, **12** for **$1.35**, **100** for **$7.50**. Also obtainable in Leather Binding, with gold edges, **Price 50c each, 3 for $1.25, $4.50 per doz. Magnifying Glass** for use with Midget Bible, **15c.**

STAGE MONEY

With a bunch of these bills, it is easy for each person of limited means to appear prosperous by flashing a roll of these bills at the proper time and peeling off a genuine bill or two from the outside of the roll, the effect created will be found to be all that can be desired. **Prices, postpaid: 40 Bills 20c, 120 for 50c, or $3.50 thousand postpaid.**

Wonderful X-Ray Tube

A wonderful little instrument producing optical illusions both surprising and startling. With it you can see what is apparently the bones of your fingers, the lead in a lead pencil, the interior opening in a pipe stem, and many other similar illusions. A mystery that no one has been able to satisfactorily explain. Price **10c, 3 for 25c, 1 dozen 75c. Johnson Smith & Co.**

Good Luck Ring

Quaint and Novel Design

A VERY striking and uncommon ring. Silver finish, skull and crossbone design, with two brilliant, flashing gems sparkling out of the eyes. Said by many to bring Good Luck to the wearer, hence its name, **Good Luck Ring.** Very unique ring that you will take a pride in wearing. **ONLY 25 CENTS.**

Exploding Cigarettes

JUST LIKE ORDINARY CIGARETTES, BUT SUCH REAL STARTLERS! The box contains ten genuine cigarettes of excellent quality. They appear so real, but when each cigarette is about one-third smoked, the victim gets a very great surprise as it goes off with a loud **BANG!** A great mirth provoker yet entirely harmless. **Price 25c per box.**

Popular Watch Charms

15c

ONLY 3 for 40c; $1.35 doz.

Very pretty little curiosities and decidedly novel. Fitted with Magnifying Lenses that enlarge the pictures to a very surprising degree; in fact, it seems almost incredible that a clear picture could be possible in such a small compass, and how sharp and distinct they show up when you look through. Come in assorted views—Actresses, views of Panama Canal, Lord's Prayer in type, etc.

Mystic Skeleton

A jointed figure of a skeleton 14 in. in height, will dance to music and perform various gyrations and movements while the operator may be some distance from it.

10c ea. pd.

Novelty Badges

Kissing Permit 10c *Garter Inspector 10c*

Two very novel metal badges, nickel plated, that you can wear, giving you fun out of all proportion to their trifling cost. **10c, each badge, 3 for 25c, or 75c per doz. p.pd.**

MAGIC FLUTE

Wonderfully Sweet Toned and Musical

Post Paid 25c

The Magic Flute, or Humanatone, is a unique and novel musical instrument that is played with nose and mouth combined. There is just a little knack in playing it which, when once acquired after a little practice will enable you to produce very sweet music that somewhat resembles a flute. There is no fingering, and once you have mastered it you can play all kinds of music with facility and ease. When played as an accompaniment to a piano or any other musical instrument, the effect is as charming as it is surprising.

BLANK CARTRIDGE PISTOL

Protection against Burglars, Tramps & Dogs

Prices 50c $1.00 Postpaid

Well made and effective; modelled on latest type of Revolver; appearance alone is enough to scare a burglar. When loaded it may be as effective as a real revolver without danger to life. It takes standard .22 Cal. Blank Cartridges obtainable everywhere. **Price 50c, superior quality, $1.00 postpaid. Blank Cartridges,** by express, **50c** per **100** Holster (Cowboy type) for Blank Cartridge Pistol, **50c**

Johnson Smith & Co., Dept. 710, Racine, Wis.

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THROW YOUR VOICE

Into a trunk, under the bed or anywhere. Lots of fun fooling the teacher, policeman or friends.

THE VENTRILO

a little instrument, fits in the mouth out of sight, used with above for Bird Calls, etc. Anyone can use it.

Never Fails. A 32 page book on ventriloquism, the Ventrillo, ALL FOR 10 CENTS

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Everything about the **Ku Klux Klan** told in a clear, fearless manner. Book tells all—How it started and was oppressed in 1871—The New Ku Klux Klan—How Organized—How Members are Enrolled—Oath of the Klan—**Questions for Candidates**—Creed—Objects of the Order—Obedience—Fidelity—Pledge of Loyalty—**Ku Klux Klan and the Masons**—The Jews—The Masons—Real K. of C. Oath—The Negro Ku Klux Klan, etc., etc. Latest and most complete book on the Klan published. **Price 35c, Postpaid.**

Stamps or Coin

PISTOL, OPERA & FIELD GLASS

PRICE POSTPAID. **$1.00**

LOOK!

It is made in the shape of and looks like a regular Automatic Pistol. No one is likely to stop and ask you whether it is real or not. Thus it is likely to prove itself very handy in an emergency. On pressing the trigger it opens up, as shown in the illustration at the right, revealing nine most useful articles—Opera and Field Glass, Telescope, Mirror, Magnifying Glass and Burning Lens, Reading Glass, Sun Dial, Sun Compass, etc. In the handle of the revolver there is a place for various pocket necessaries, such as First Aid Articles, Buttons, Pins, etc. The Pistol is of sheet metal, blued finish, that can be carried comfortably in pocket. **PRICE $1.00.**

HOT DOG!

SENSATIONAL NEW NOVELTY

It is made of rubber like a small balloon. Contains a curious chemical that acts in a most remarkable way. Squeeze the deflated balloon with the hand and it suddenly becomes quite warm and fills itself up with air. It is SELF-BLOWING. Play all sorts of tricks with it. Lay it on a chair; place it secretly underneath anyone; underneath anyone's pillow; drop it in someone's pocket, and after a short time, when friction causes the chemicals to act, a large and superbly colored balloon develops. Each Hot Dog in a small box. Quite harmless. Is made of fun. **15c. each, 3 for 40c., $1.35 doz. postpaid.**

SEX Indicator 25c

Sex Indicator

Hold the **MAGIC INDICATOR** over a man's hand—instantly it moves in a straight line, backward and forward. Hold it over a woman's hand and it describes a complete and continuous circle. The same action can be obtained over a letter written by a man or woman, etc. It is fascinating; baffling. We have never been able to figure out how it's done, but we've never seen it fail. Many novel and entertaining feats may be performed with the Sex Indicator. For example, similar results can be obtained with animals, cats, dogs, rabbits, over birds, chickens, canaries, etc. Also used to predetermine the sex of chickens and birds, etc., in fact it is sold as a patented egg tester in Europe. **Price 25c, or 3 for 65c. ppd.**

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"Can he really play?" a girl whispered. "Heavens, no," Arthur exclaimed. "He never played a note in his life."

They Laughed When I Sat Down At the Piano But When I Started to Play!—

ARTHUR had just played "The Rosary." The room rang with applause. Then to the amazement of all my friends, I strode confidently over to the piano and sat down.

"Jack is up to his old tricks," somebody chuckled. The crowd laughed. They were all certain that I couldn't play a single note.

"Can he really play?" I heard a girl whisper to Arthur.

"Heavens, no," Arthur exclaimed. "He never played a note in all his life. . . ."

I decided to make the most of the situation. With mock dignity I drew out a silk handkerchief and lightly dusted off the piano keys. Then I rose and gave the revolving piano stool a quarter of a turn. The crowd laughed merrily. Then I started to play.

Instantly a tense silence fell on the guests. I played the first few bars of Liszt's immortal Liebestraume. I heard gasps of amazement. My friends sat breathless—spellbound! I played on.

A Complete Triumph!

As the last notes of the Liebestraume died away, the room resounded with a sudden roar of applause. I found myself surrounded by excited faces. Everybody was exclaiming with delight—plying me with rapid questions. . . .

"Jack! Why didn't you tell us you could play like that?" . . . "Where *did* you learn?"—"Who *was* your teacher?"

"I have never even *seen* my teacher," I replied. "And just a short while ago I couldn't play a note."

"Quit your kidding," laughed Arthur, himself an accomplished pianist. "You've been studying for years. I can tell."

"I have been studying only a short while," I insisted. "I kept it a secret so that I could surprise you folks."

Pick Your Instrument

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Harmony and Composition
Violin	Sight Singing
Drums and Traps	Ukulele
Banjo	Guitar
Tenor, Plectrum or 5-String Guitar	Hawaiian Steel
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Flute	Piccolo
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Voice and Speech Culture	
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No Teacher Needed

Then I told them the whole story.

"It seems just a short while ago that I saw an ad of the U. S. School of Music mentioning a new method of learning to play which only cost a few cents a day! The ad told how a woman had mastered the piano in her spare time at home—and **without a teacher!** The method she used required no laborious scales or exercises. It sounded so convincing that I filled out the coupon requesting the Free Demonstration Lesson.

"It arrived promptly and I started in that very night to study it. I was amazed to see how easy it was to play this new way. I sent for the course and found it was just as easy as A, B, C! Before I knew it I was playing all the pieces I liked best. I could play ballads or classical numbers or jazz, with equal ease! And I never did have any special talent for music!"

Play Any Instrument

You, too, can now learn music—right at home—in half the usual time. You can't go wrong with this simple new method which has already shown almost half a million people how to play their favorite instruments by note. Forget that old-fashioned idea that you need special "talent." Just read the list of instruments in the panel, decide which one you want to play and the U. S. School will do the rest.

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Thousands of successful students never dreamed they possessed musical ability until it was revealed to them by a remarkable "Musical Ability Test" which we send entirely without cost with our interesting free booklet and Demonstration Lesson.

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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," with introduction by Dr. Frank Crane, Demonstration Lesson and particulars of your Special Offer. I am interested in the following course:

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